SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 522. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 31ST, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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A Happy New Year from the Editor and Staff.

Short Stories

No. 522.] [One Penny.

For the

Week ending December 31st, 1898.

An Eventful Winter.

"I can't bear foreigners," said Lady Sylvia Somerton crossly. "They are dirty, they are dishonest, they are untruthful."

"My dear child!" her uncle remonstrated. "Surely your assertions are rather sweeping. Have you ever been abroad?"

"No," she confessed, "I have not."

"Then you judge all nations by that French scoundrel I had as a valet—and perhaps a few organ-grinders!"

Lady Sylvia laughed. She had the most delightful gift for seeing the ridiculous side of everything, even when things became personal.

"Well, anyhow," she said, "why go to Pau? A nasty, gossiping place—so I have been told."

"For the simple reason that there I shall get a little hunting."

"Hunting!" she said scornfully—"with bagged foxes! Can't you see the poor things, stiff and sore from being tied up in a sack being turned out for

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your delectation — if *you* call that sport then *I* don't!"

"Sylvia," said Lord Rivers mildly, "do you know that you are in a very bad temper?"

At that Lady Sylvia's clouded face cleared.

"I *am* cross," she said impulsively, "and a selfish wretch—of course, we'll go to the Antipodes if you like."

"In the meantime," he said good-humouredly, "I only want to go to Pau." And peace was restored.

Lady Sylvia was an orphan, and lived almost entirely with her uncle, who was devoted to his beautiful niece, and usually gave in to her whims, but in this instance he had been given a hint by the doctors that, for a winter or two, Lady Sylvia would be better out of England, but that he was not to frighten her by telling her so—hence the story of the "hunting."

So—to Pau they went, and when Lady Sylvia stood on the "Place Royale" and saw the Pyrenees before her—a glorious panorama of mountains, some of them crowned with snow—in the foreground the sunny "Coteaux" and the shining river, she breathed a deep sigh of appreciation.

"I am glad we came," she said, and then Lord Rivers knew that he had nothing more to fear, and would hear no more reproaches.

"There is a dance to-night at Lady Morley's," he said. "She is an old friend of yours, isn't she? I accepted the invitation on your behalf."

Lady Sylvia nodded—her eyes still fixed on the mountains, but presently her thoughts came back to earth with a run.

"I shall wear my white satin," she said decidedly, "and the turquoise necklace you gave me," and she ran off to hold a solemn conference with her maid.

She was certainly looking her loveliest that night—But the soft blue-black hair, the large, dark, dreamy eyes, the clear olive skin, were more the features of a Southerner than those of an English girl.

The same thought crossed the mind of the young Duque Sebastian Flor d'Espina, as Lady Morley, at his request, introduced him to Lady Sylvia.

The latter made a mental note that this was the best-looking man she had ever met—and how clean for a foreigner!

He began to talk to her—but in broken English, and conversation half of which is "word-hunting" is apt to be a trifle stilted, so they did not get on very well.

"Supposing we talk Spanish," she said suddenly, "it would make things easier for both of us." She said the above sentence in his own tongue, and he was startled to hear how she pronounced her words, like one to the manner born.

She noted his look, and smiled.

"I have a Spanish grandmother," she said, "and have spoken Spanish since I was a child."

"Ah," he said, "then that is why you have a Spanish face—and hold your fan Spanish fashion with your thumb outside."

She laughed.

"Is that Spanish?" she asked. "Then it must be the result of heredity, for I do it quite unconsciously."

After that evening, Lady Sylvia met Sebastian Flor d'Espina everywhere, the acquaintance ripened into friendship—the friendship—well, in any case, Lord Rivers thought it prudent to make a few inquiries about the young man in question, to avoid future complications.

The result of his inquiries was eminently satisfactory. The Duque Flor d'Espina was the head of one of the oldest families in Spain, he was very rich, was an attaché at the Spanish Embassy in Paris, was wild about diplomacy, and would, in all probability, blossom some day into an ambassador.

The situation, Lord Rivers felt, was not one to cavil about. Of the man himself, he knew nothing; but "Sylvia is not the woman to marry either a roué or a fool," he decided, and as he had known her since her childhood he was competent to judge.

One night at a dance, Lady Sylvia noticed that Flor d'Espina was preoccupied, his face wore an anxious, worried look, foreign to him; and she made up her mind to ask him what was the matter.

"Please tell me," she said, "if I can be of any use; but a woman can't do much, only sympathise."

"And that means helping a man over his discouragements and bad times generally, and giving him heart to start afresh," he said, "so I wouldn't say 'only' if I were you; but my trouble, I will tell you, though assuredly in this one you will not be able to help."

"Try me," she said quickly, "there is nearly always a way out of a difficulty, and two pairs of eyes can see better than one."

"Well," he said, lowering his voice, "the case is this. The Carlists have got up a plot against the Queen of Spain. The idea is to surround her villa at B—— take her prisoner, carry her on board the gun-boat which is always there for her protection, but on board of which the officers are Carlists to a man.

"She is to be taken straight to Brazil. Meantime the Carlists have got up a tremendous movement, it has spread all over the Basque provinces, and, within a few hours after their grand 'coup,' an army of some thousands of desperate men will march on Madrid and proclaim Don Carlos King.

"Now, I have been warned of this, and would go to Madrid myself, but, almost simultaneously with this information, I got a peremptory summons from my chief to return to Paris at once.

"I start by the first train to-morrow—I am only here to say 'good-bye'—Now, you can see what a dilemma I amin. I don't know a single soul here whom Icould trust in such a matter, and the coup is fixed for four days hence."

Lady Sylvia thought a moment before she asked—

"If you knew of such a 'soul' what would he be expected to do?"

"Go post haste to Madrid, and warn the authorities there. There is no time to be lost—I dare not wire or even write—I hear half the postal officials are in the plot and, if that is so, I should spoil everything, as it is, if the authorities were fore-warned they might bring the Queen privately to Madrid—await the 'plot's' fulfilment and arrest the ringleaders. Spaniards are like every other nation—they need some one to follow—'heads' gone—confusion reigns supreme, and chaos is not that which ought to reign in Spain."

Again Lady Sylvia was silent—then she laid a hand gently on his arm.

"Listen," she said. "In my childish days, I was at school in an English convent. In the same class with me was one of the Spanish princesses. We made great friends, chiefly, of course, because of my knowledge of Spanish. But the queer thing about it was that there was so strong a likeness between us, that the Nuns used to laugh about it—once or twice, each dressed in our quaint sky-blue 'uniforms' we were taken for each other."

"All that is very interesting, dear lady," Sebastian

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said a trifle impatiently, "but what on earth has it got to do with the subject?"

"Wait a moment—and you will see. The day after to-morrow, at mid-day, a special train has been o dered to take that same Princess to Madrid (I saw her only this afternoon, and she told me so herself.) She is going with a lady-in-waiting and an Equerry—good. *She* will not go—but *I* will—my cousin Lilian Maxwell as my lady-in-waiting—my uncle shall be Equerry for this once!"

"Are you joking?"

"Joking! No, certainly not. You must wire to the railway authorities at Bayonne in the name of the Princess that you want the 'Special' to-morrow morning at eight, having changed your plans.

"There is a very early train from here, which would just get us to Bayonne in time. If we could have confided in her, all would be well, but it is quite an open secret that her sympathies are all with Don Carlos, and we must just trust to Providence that nobody will find out the fraud till we get to our destination.

"Give me the address of the man in Madrid to whom you must write a letter, with names and details, and leave the rest to me."

Flor d'Espina stooped and kissed her hand.

"You are an angel!" he said.

* * * * *

Lord Rivers was wakened out of a post-prandial nap to hear his niece's queer story and her newly-fledged plans. She was half afraid he would forbid her to carry out her scheme, but she only proved by that how comparatively little she knew him.

A Conservative of the old school, revolution and rebellion were to him like red rags to a bull—besides, he had once been to the Spanish Court and had a most chivalrous devotion for the Queen, placed as she was in so difficult a position.

So now he was furious, but all he said was a big oath, and then, "I beg your pardon, my dear, but really, sometimes swearing is almost necessary—safety-valve you know—yes, of course, I'll go. You must wake Lilian up, ask her advice and tell her to hold her tongue," —which rather Irish speech amused Lady Sylvia not a little.

Well—strange as it may seem, everything went most smoothly.

The telegram was sent by Flor d'Espina, the party arrived at the Bayonne Station, and "Her Royal Highness," amid bowing officials proceeded in her special train to Spain.

At every station where they stopped, bouquets were presented, and bonbonnières, an exquisite déjeuner was provided when the time came, and lady Sylvia and her companions thoroughly enjoyed the chocolates and the fun—the former, (speaking Spanish like a native, and having been posted up by Flor d'Espina about one or two trifling but in this case important rules of Spanish Royal etiquette) knew how to behave, in fact, Lord Rivers declared afterwards that she seemed quite at home in her *rôle*.

At last the party arrived at Madrid, and uncle and niece drove straight to the address Sebastian had given them, left his letter and then went to a hotel.

Next morning, the papers contained a most amusing account of how an English Miladi had by *mistake* gone off in the Princess Dolores' special train, how she had accepted the Royal goods provided for her, and taken the salaams and civilities (intended for Royalty) as her simple due—but not one paper even hinted that the thing had been pre-arranged, but the person who was most puzzled about the affair was the Princess Dolores herself, who declared that she had never sent a telegram to Bayonne—but luckily her statement was made to the authorities too late to warn the Carlists that somebody was stirring against them, and the Queen and the little King were conveyed in safety to Madrid.

Lady Sylvia and her uncle were sent for by Her Majesty, and, after that interview, Lady Sylvia expressed no further surprise at the unbounded loyalty, devotion, and admiration, which Flor d'Espina had always manifested towards his liege lady.

As they were at Madrid at any rate, Lord Rivers said: "They had better look round them a bit"—so, for some days, Lady Sylvia lived amongst Murillos, and dim old churches, bewildering but exquisite mazes of stone.

One day a long letter came for her.

She carried it off to her room, where she stayed a long time, but she was hunted out again by Lord Rivers, who came to tell her to get ready—the Queen had sent for them again.

This time her Majesty offered Lady Sylvia a post at Court as Maid of Honour to herself.

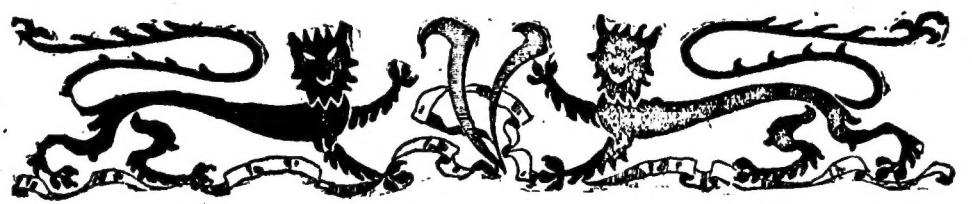
Lord Rivers looked at his niece as they drove away from the palace (they were to give a definite answer to the offer in a few days time).

"Why don't you try it?" he said.

Lady Sylvia laughed, and Lord Rivers was quick to notice a touch of embarrassment in his niece's voice as she answered.

"I won't take the post for the simple reason that when you came just now to fetch me, I was busy writing a letter to accept another situation I have been offered —as Sebastian's wife."

CONSTANCE CRAIGIE HACKETT.



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Love's Sacrifice.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

By MARIAN FINDLAY.

Author of "Not in Vain," "Eileen," "A Girl without Sentiment," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"WOMEN MUST WEEP."

A GIRL and a man were walking together down a pretty country lane in the South of England. It was early spring, but already the violets were peeping shyly forth, the hedgerows becoming rapidly sweet and radiant, and, on every side, was the glad promise of renewed life and beauty.

The girl was walking with bent head, nervously pulling at the ribbons which adorned her dainty waist, heeding not the sunshine or the flowers, for her heart was full of sadness.

The man strolled at her side in silence, his hands were thrust into his pockets, his straw hat pushed to the back of his curly head, while his fair, handsome face wore an unmistakable look of serious annoyance.

His companion was the first to speak.

"You are not angry with me, Duncan, are you?" she questioned, laying her hand half shyly upon his arm.

Duncan Marston gazed moodily before him, not heeding the gentle touch, and seeing not the tearful, beseeching eyes raised to his face.

"I am disappointed in you, Madeline," he said coldly, "bitterly disappointed. I thought you really cared for me, and I find I have been mistaken. I am not angry, my dear, only disappointed."

"Duncan," the girl cried, in tones full of anguish, "how can you be so cruel? You thought I cared for you! Do you not know that I love you more dearly, far, far more dearly than my life, that it is wringing my heart to let you leave me, and to think of facing my life without your love to brighten it? Oh, Heaven, how shall I bear it!"

Her voice broke and the slim hands were tightly clasped upon her breast, as if to still the throbbing, aching heart.

Marston could not but be touched by the bitter anguish in her last words, he put out his arms and drew her to him.

"Madeline," he whispered, "you are making life needlessly hard for us both. From a foolish, romantic sense of 'duty' you are casting love away from you. My child, you will soon find that you have made a poor exchange."

"Someone once said to me that the only thing worth living for was to do one's duty," Madeline remarked dreamily, resting her head contentedly upon her lover's breast, whilst his arms encircled her.

"That is utter nonsense," was his emphatic reply. "The only thing worth living for is love, my darling, it is the most mighty power in the world. Sweet, do you doubt it?" and his lips were laid upon her own in tender, passionate kisses, while he held her yet more closely to his heart.

Her heart echoed his words; no, she did not doubt it, she knew that its magic touch has power to transform a wilderness into a garden, a humble cottage into a palace of contentment and happiness; that it has power to make the homeliest face beautiful, the tired aching heart, glad and joyous, the darkest days bright with hope and gladsomeness. The God whose name it is planted the sweet flower of Love; it blossomed first in the Garden of Eden, it has been watered with a Saviour's tears and has grown and flourished until youth and age, poet and philosopher, sage and historian, acknowledge its almighty sway and unite in proclaiming it to be verily and indeed "The Greatest Thing in the World."

"Duncan," Madeline said presently, lifting her head from its resting-place, and raising her grave, earnest, eyes to his, "do you think I could expect or look for any real happiness if I sacrificed my poor little Vera? I am all she has in the world, and I promised her mother that the child should ever be my first care and thought——"

"Yes, yes, I know," her lover interrupted impatiently, "but that was years ago, you were too young then to realise the charge with which you were burdening yourself, or to think of the new interests which might come into your life, rendering the keeping of such a promise a difficult task."

"Lapse of time does not make a promise less binding, nor justify one in breaking it," Madeline put in softly.

"I am not asking you to break it," Marston returned, a little reproachfully. "Of course I should not dream of separating you from your little niece. I will even promise to care for the child, for your sake, if you will consent to become my wife and accompany me to India. Madeline, my dear one, can you let me go alone?"

Madeline's heart throbbed passionately.

"Duncan," she moaned, "you are breaking my heart. You know I cannot leave Vera, and the climate of India would kill her, Dr. Kingston tells me, even if she survived the voyage."

"Dr. Kingston be—shot!" was the angry response; "he is an old mollycoddle, and you are little better Madeline, where that child is concerned. If you really cared for me you would not continually be putting her first."

Madeline passed by the unjust words in silence; Marston knew they were ungenerous, and was quick to acknowledge his harshness.

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"Forgive me, my precious one," he whispered remorsefully. "I scarcely know what I am saying, it is so hard to think of losing you."

Madeline smiled bravely up at him, though her grey eyes were misty with tears.

"My poor boy," she said tenderly. "Ah, Duncan, if I could bear your share of the pain as well as my own, how gladly I would free you from it."

"My dear one," and he raised her hand to his lips almost reverently. "That is like a woman's divine unselfishness. What selfish brutes we men are compared with you! Sweetheart, you make me ashamed of myself."

"I don't feel unselfish, dear," she returned sadly. "I feel as if I want to keep you here," clasping her hands round his arm, "always beside me, and never—never let you go."

He smiled down upon her and touched her forehead lightly with his lips.

"That would be an ideal state of things, my pet, but unfortunately it cannot be carried into effect. 'Men must work' the song says, does it not?"

"Yes," she reponded, with sudden bitterness.

"And women must weep,
And the sooner it's over
The sooner to sleep.

"Oh, Duncan, why is life so hard? A few months ago," she went on, not waiting for him to reply, "when your love came into my life, I thought the world such a glorious, beautiful place to be in. Oh, I was happy, blindly, madly happy, never dreaming that life could hold for me aught but good; but duty's cold, stern fingers touched me, and I awoke from my rosy dreams of happiness to find that for me, such things were not to be! With women I think to love means to suffer, and their whole life may be summed up in one word: 'Renunciation.'"

Her cheeks were burning as she spoke, Marston laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"My little girl," he said gently, "it is so unlike you to speak so bitterly, you are always so brave, so patient."

"I have tried to be so, oh, I *have* tried," she moaned, "but the struggle, the pain is getting almost more than I can bear. Think, Duncan, just think of all the long, lonely years which must pass before I can see your dear face again; try to think, if you can, how the days will go drearily by, how I shall hunger and thirst for the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand—"

"And do you not think that I shall suffer in my lonely, far-off home?" he questioned reproachfully. "You will have Vera to comfort you, but I shall be alone."

"Ah, but it is all so different for a man, there is so much more in his life, there are so many outside interests to take him out of himself, whilst we women have, of necessity, to be stayers at home, and our grief is an ever present reality to us, there is no getting away from it."

Her companion made no reply, he recognised the truth of her words and could not gainsay them.

They walked on for a short time in silence through the fragrant lanes, where the setting sun was casting chastened gleams of mellow gold upon tree and hedgerow, giving to each a tender, softened radiance.

"I must go home now, Duncan," Madeline said at length, her voice sounding dull and weary, "but before I leave you I want to say that when you go away, I want you to feel that you are free. I shall not hold you bound, dear, in any way, and, in token of your freedom, I must give you back your gift."

She unclasped a slender gold chain as she spoke, and laid it, with the pendant—a small gold heart set with a single diamond—in his hand. For an instance only he held it, then, with a violent gesture, dashed the pretty trinket to the ground and set his foot upon it.

"Duncan," Madeline cried in dismay, "what have you done?"

And stooping, she tenderly raised the crushed fragments, pressing them lovingly to her lips.

"How cruel you women can be!" Marston cried, his face crimson with indignant anger.

"Madeline, are you utterly heartless I wonder!"

Madeline glanced at the broken trinket.

"I fear I am—now," she returned, smiling bitterly at her own wan attempt at a joke. "Don't be angry with me, dearest," she pleaded, "I did it for the best. You cannot guess what it would have cost me to give it up. Oh, my dear love, how can I let you go? If, in the years to come, God will give you back to me once again, my whole life shall be one long, long thanksgiving."

The sweet voice trembled, and the delicate face grew very pale.

Marston took her tenderly in his arms.

"God bless you, my heart's darling," he whispered fondly, "God bless and keep you always."

CHAPTER II.

Love's Big Heart.

When Madeline reached the pretty, low white house which she shared with her little niece and their faithful old servant, she found that Vera was already in bed.

"The poor lamb was just wearied out with pain," said Anne, "so I took and popped her into bed. 'I shall not go to sleep Anne,' she says, as I was carrying her up-stairs, 'I can't sleep till I have kissed Love good-night.'"

"Dear child," murmured Madeline. "I will go to her at once."

"Is that you, my own Love?" cried a sweet, childish voice as Madeline entered the bedroom. "Love," was the quaintly pretty name which Vera had bestowed upon the aunt she held so dear.

"Yes, darling," and Madeline laid her hand tenderly upon the hot forehead.

"Has the pain been very bad, my pet?"

"Oh, not so very bad," the child returned bravely. "My stupid back ached a bit, so Anne thought I had better come to bed."

"I am afraid it must have ached more than 'a bit,' my darling, to make these cheeks so flushed and your hands so dry and burning," Madeline said tenderly.

"Never mind now," returned Vera, "I shall soon be better now you are come," and the little arms were put up to encircle Madeline's neck.

"Did you have a nice walk?" the child asked presently.

"Very nice, darling," Madeline smiled bitterly to herself as she uttered the words.

"Your favourite violets are beginning to show their pretty heads," she continued, "I must carry you into the lane to peep at them to-morrow, if you are well enough."

"Oh, I should like that," was the eager reply, "but I'm afraid I shall be too heavy for you."

"No fear of that, my pet, you are such a mite of a thing, though you are nearly eight years old. And now shut those bright eyes, which are themselves just like two big violets, and I will try to sing the pain away."

Softly Madeline crooned an evening hymn to the

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tired little sufferer, her low, sweet voice seemed to have an almost magical effect, the restless limbs grew more quiet, and the tired lines on the *spirituelle* little face relaxed.

"How nice that is," the child murmured at length, with a little sigh of utter content.

"Not asleep yet, my birdie?" Madeline questioned.

"No, but I don't mind that; I think I am too happy to sleep. Dear Love," and again the fragile arms were put forth to draw Madeline's face down to her own. "Dear, dear Love, how good you are to me!"

"My own little girl, you are all I have to be good to and care for—Oh, Vera, my treasure, love me all you can, you are all I have in the world," and with a gesture of utter abandon, Madeline sank on her knees beside the bed and buried her face in her hands.

For a few moments nothing could be heard in the little white-curtained room but the child's quick, anxious breathing, and Madeline's stifled sobs.

With gentle touch Vera tenderly stroked the bent head. "My own, own Love," she whispered again and again. "You needn't tell me to care for you; why I couldn't live without you!"

It was sweet to Madeline to feel the child's soft, clinging arms round her, and the loving whispered words were as refreshing to her aching heart as summer rain to drooping flowers.

A week later and Duncan Marston was gone. The last good-byes were said, the last tender words spoken, and then Madeline saw him leave her. How and when would they meet again, she vaguely wondered, with a dull, sick feeling at her heart. He had spoken hopefully of his return, and of their happy life together in the years to come, but Madeline's heart was too sore to think of the future, and meanwhile life had to be faced, and all the daily round of duties taken up again. The days passed wearily by, and Madeline's cheeks lost some of their soft bloom, and her sweet eyes had a wistful, far-off look which did not escape Vera's notice.

One day she was sitting beside the little invalid's couch, reading a fairy story.

"'And the handsome Prince married the lovely Princess, and he took her away to his beautiful castle, where they both lived happily ever afterwards,'" she concluded.

"There, Vera, pet, isn't it a nice ending?"

"Very nice, but they all end like that, Love, don't they?" the child returned. "Is it true, are people always happy?"

"Fairy stories are not true, my darling," Madeline replied, "and people are not always happy I am afraid. But we are happy, Vera, you and I, so we will try not to worry about imaginary unhappiness."

Vera's deep blue eyes were raised earnestly to her aunt's face, and she pushed aside the tossed golden hair from her hot cheeks.

"Are you happy?" she questioned uneasily. "Sometimes I fancy that something troubles you, dear, and you do not tell me."

"Vera, my own, you are growing fanciful," Madeline returned brightly, stooping to kiss the sweet, upturned face. "Of course I am happy."

"And there is nothing troubling you, dear Love?" the child went on with tender persistency.

Madeline could not utter what was not true with those loving eyes searching her face. She made a hasty resolve, and, kneeling beside the low couch, took the little fragile form into her arms.

"Listen, my darling," she said slowly, "I will tell you what has troubled me. I have lost something, Vera, something I prized more than all else beside, book or trinket, it matters not what it was, it is gone and can never be my own again, and I have grieved over it my darling, foolishly, childishly. My Vera would be wiser than that, would she not?"

"I don't know," the child returned thoughtfully. "I am not very wise, but I don't think it would hurt me very much to lose anything I have, so long as I kept my own dear Love."

The ready tears sprang to Madeline's eyes. Ah, was not that just what she felt? How bravely she could have faced any trouble if she could but have kept her "own dear love" at her side!

Meanwhile there came many loving letters from Marston, telling of his lonely home, and how he longed for Madeline's presence to cheer and brighten it. Thus three years slipped away, and then there came an urgent appeal to Madeline to come out to him.

"I am doing well out here, my dear one," he wrote, "but the loneliness is very great, and I need you more than any words can say. If you care for me, darling, you will put my wishes first, and if you cannot make up your mind to leave Vera at school in England, why then, you must bring her with you, and let her make her home with us."

Very tenderly and eloquently Marston pleaded his cause, and, as Madeline read the letter, her tears fell thick and fast.

To leave fragile, delicate little Vera at school was quite out of the question, while to take her abroad was a risk which Dr. Kingston would not sanction, and poor Madeline grew sick at heart as she realised that her lover's visions of far-off happiness must end, as such dreams often do. That life's stern awakening had come to her, and must be faced, alone.

A pitiful little letter it was which she sent to her lover, a sweet, womanly effort to soften his pain and conceal her own anguish, which Marston, in the bitterness of his disappointment, chose to blindly misinterpret.

He could not guess with what heart-broken sobs those brave, tender words had been penned, and knew nothing of the weary loneliness and heartsick longing which she had so generously striven to hide, that his pain might be lessened.

In hot anger he wrote again; bitter, cruel words, which seemed to burn themselves into Madeline's brain when she read them.

"Dear God," she moaned, "how shall I bear it! He thinks I do not care and that I have grown cold and heartless; well, perhaps it is better so, 'twill be the easier for him to forget me, but oh, my dear, dear love, how am I going to live through the long, lonely years without you?"

CHAPTER III.

Ten Years Later.

It was Springtime once more, glad, joyous Springtime. The hedgerows were gay with blossoms, the balmy air was filled with a thousand fragrant perfumes, the birds were carolling their happiest strains, and all Nature seemed with one accord to rejoice that the winter was over and the sweet resurrection of the year at hand.

The windows of the pretty morning room at Ivy Cottage were thrown wide open, and gave a welcome admittance to the many sweet sounds and perfumes.

Great bowls of purple lilac stood upon the dark oaken

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table, and trailing boughs of white and pink hawthorn were placed in tall jars in distant corners of the room, making the air heavy with their fragrance.

A bright, girlish face, framed in a wealth of wavy, golden hair, looked in at the window and greeted the occupant of the room with a loving smile.

"It is such a perfect day!" she exclaimed, "do put your work away and come into the garden, Love."

Vera still clung to the old fond name, and Madeline was glad to have it so. She looked up from her sewing, smiling at the tender, coaxing tones which she found so hard to resist.

"The wallflowers seem to be crying out for you to come and admire them, and everything is so sweet and lovely that it is a shame to stay indoors. Oh, Love, isn't it a glorious, beautiful world?" the girl added, with a glad, joyous ring in her voice.

"Very beautiful, my Vera," was the low reply; there was a tinge of sadness in the soft voice which Madeline could not entirely repress.

How fair and sweet the old-world garden had seemed to her but a few years ago, when, with lightest, gladdest heart, she had been wont to meet her lover, listen to his burning words of love and feel his strong, tender arms around her. Ah, surely she had Heaven in her heart in those dear, halcyon days!

But now, alas, only the memory of former happiness remained to be dwelt on, in her solitary moments, with yearning heart-hunger.

Stifling a sigh, she rose to join Vera in the garden, and together they wandered about the paths, pausing beside the old sun-dial while Vera laughingly traced the quaint figures with a little sunburnt forefinger.

They made a winsome picture as they stood together, Madeline, in her soft, grey gown, with its dainty ruffles of snowy lace, serving as an admirable foil to the fresh girlish form at her side, clad in palest, shell-like pink, the golden hair bound by a ribbon of the same delicate hue, the big garden hat slung over her arm, and in lieu of being used for its legitimate purpose converted into an impromptu flower basket and filled to over-flowing with fragrant clusters of lilac.

"Is it not exquisite?" she cried, turning to Madeline and burying her face in the mass of blossom.

"Where are you going to put it all, Vera?" Madeline questioned, smilingly. "Every available vase is filled already, and each room is a veritable flower-garden."

"Oh, I'll find a corner for it somewhere, never fear, I cannot help gathering it, it is just irresistible."

The sound of footsteps upon the gravelled path made them both turn to see a broad, manly figure coming towards them. There was something familiar to Madeline in the tall, erect form and handsome, smiling face. A sudden rush of crimson flooded her face from brow to chin, and she stepped quickly forward.

"Duncan!" she cried almost breathlessly, "Duncan, is it possible?"

For answer he took her hands in his and held them closely. "Yes, Madeline, it is I," he whispered. "I see I am not forgotten."

For a moment Madeline did not speak, her heart was too full. Then she turned to the girl at her side.

"Vera, my darling," she said speaking hurriedly, and in tones strangely unlike her usually low, calm utterance, "this is my old friend, Mr. Marston; you will scarcely remember him, I think, you were so young when he went away."

Vera held out her hand with a frank, unaffected smile. "Oh, yes," she said, "I remember Mr. Marston quite well, and I am glad to welcome back an old friend."

"That is a very kind remark, Miss Vera," Marston said as he took her hand and gazed smilingly down into her eyes, "I am happy to think you will count me amongst your friends."

"Love's friends are always mine also," the girl returned simply; then turned to her aunt, saying she would take the flowers indoors as the hot sun was withering them, and Madeline was left alone with her lover.

For a few moments neither spoke. Madeline felt dazed and confused; the golden sunlight half-blinded her, and the strange, sudden joy in her heart was almost pain.

Marston took her hand and drew it through his arm, looking at her with the old, fond glance she remembered and loved so well.

"The years have been long without you, Madeline," he said tenderly, "but they have made little change in you. It is just the same sweet little woman I left behind, more than a dozen years ago."

Madeline laughed, softly, happily, the sudden, sweet gladness seemed to transform her; the lines which had begun to show round the tender mouth had disappeared, as if by magic. There was a glad ring in her voice, and a young, joyous light in her eyes as she met her lover's gaze, with simple, unaffected happiness.

"You are changed, Duncan," she said half shyly, "you are handsomer than ever, but I should have known you amongst a thousand others."

Marston laughed a pleased, gratified laugh, and pressed her hand more closely to his side.

"The change is only in my outward appearance, my darling, I assure you," he whispered fondly, "but what miracle has been wrought in your little Vera? The delicate child I remember seems to have quite disappeared."

"Yes," Madeline returned gladly, "Vera has now quite outgrown her early weakness and is fairly strong, and is she not lovely, Duncan?"

"Is she?" Marston responded absently, "I didn't notice. I had eyes for one face only, my dearest, the sweetest face on earth to me." And Madeline's heart thrilled with happiness as she listened to the tender words.

All the long, weary years of separation were forgotten now, the sweet, glad present blotted out all remembrance of the past. And is it not ever thus? We are so like the children who cry for their broken plaything, until becoming enamoured of some new toy, the trouble is all forgotten, and the smiles return even before the tears are dried.

We all crave for happiness in this life, it is a natural desire, and surely no wrong one, and, if it come to us we are always ready to forget the pain with which it was preceded, while we drink to the full of the cup of joy.

So the days came and went as an happy dream to Madeline, and life had a deeper, fuller meaning than ever before.

She longed that all the world might share her gladness, and the great love of her life, almost divine in its rare unselfishness, filled her only with purer, higher thoughts and fairer aspirations.

Marston accepted her devotion very naturally and with much complaisance. It pleased him and gratified his vanity to note how the sweet, bright colour would flood her face at his coming, and the swift, glad light illumine her eyes when they met his own.

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Three months flew by ere the first glamour of Madeline's happiness was shadowed, but at length a cloud arose, a cloud at first no bigger than a man's hand, but which hid the sunlight from her and filled her with a terrible, nameless dread.

It was a glorious day in August, the sky was a deep, cloudless blue, and the sun blazed o'erhead in fierce splendour.

Madeline and Marston were seated in the shadow of the verandah, which formed a welcome shelter from the hot sun.

They were very silent as they sat there. Madeline's work had fallen unheeded to the ground and her hands lay idly clasped in her lap. Marston was leaning back in a low garden chair, lazily watching the faint, blue clouds of smoke slowly issuing from his lips as he silently puffed away at his pipe. Presently they heard a quick, light step, and a soft voice singing:

"There's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream,"

made them both look up.

"You two look half asleep," Vera cried merrily, bringing her song to an abrupt end. "I feel it is my duty to arouse you and find you some employment, you both look so incorrigibly lazy."

"It is so hot," Madeline murmured, half apologetically, while Marston rose and pulled a chair forward for Vera.

"Love, here are some letters which have just come for you, are you equal to the exertion of reading them?" Vera questioned saucily, tossing a bulky packet into Madeline's lap. "And you Mr. Marston," she continued, "may hold this wool for me; it will be nice for you to feel that you are doing something really useful."

Marston smiled as he obediently took the skein from her hand, in doing so his fingers touched hers, and she blushed a vivid, rosy red at the contact.

"Why are you winding all this wool, Miss Vera?" Marston questioned presently, as he watched the small hands flying to and fro. "Isn't it much too hot to think of wearing such wraps as this stuff makes?"

"Yes," asserted Vera, "but it will not always be summer remember, we have to look ahead sometimes and think for the future."

"Ah," Marston replied dreamily, "if we could always look ahead, how differently our lives would turn out; if it were possible to look into the future how many of our early errors might be prevented!"

His deep tones were full of significance, but softly though they were uttered, the words did not escape Madeline's quick ears.

She did not speak, but her heart seemed to die within her as she listened.

She watched the shy colour come and go in Vera's cheeks, and she saw the tender light in Marston's eyes, which, long ago, she alone had power to call forth, and suddenly it seemed to her that life had lost all its sweetness and light; she shivered slightly and rose somewhat unsteadily to her feet.

Vera turned swiftly.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "Are you not well?"

"I am a little tired, Vera, that is all, the heat has made my head ache, I shall be better if I rest a little."

"Let me come with you," the girl cried, half rising, but Madeline laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"No, my child," she said gently, "I shall be better alone."

Once safely in her own room she shut and locked the door and sank upon her knees beside the bed; no tears came to her relief, but a low, stricken moan, "Oh, Heaven," broke from her white lips.

How long she knelt there she never knew; she sank into a dreamy state, half sleep, half stupor, from which she was at length roused by the sound of low voices, talking eagerly. She heard, as in a dream, the deep, manly voice she loved so well, telling the old, old story, she heard the soft murmur of Vera's shy replies; then, from the low movement beneath her window, and the rustle of the ivy which climbed round the house, she knew they had risen, and that Marston's arms were round the girl at his side.

Then she heard her own name timidly uttered by Vera, followed by a quick denial from Marston.

"Madeline and I are the best of friends, but nothing more," she heard him say. "We had a childish fancy for each other, years ago, but that is long since past and gone. My little one; you are my very life and soul.'

Oh, the supreme agony of that moment to Madeline' In it the bitterness of death seemed to engulf her, blotting out for ever, all the joy of living; then there came a sudden wild pain at her heart, and a blackness before her eyes. It passed away almost instantly, and she rose mechanically, smoothed her hair and arranged her dress with that strange precision which often takes possession of us in some great crisis of our lives.

She forced herself to go downstairs, to smilingly reply to Vera's loving inquiries, and to meet Marston's gaze with unruffled composure.

A few hours later, when they were alone for a short time, Madeline seized the opportunity for which she had been waiting of speaking to Marston.

"Duncan," she said quietly, without a tremour in her soft voice, "I have been thinking that we have made a mistake, you and I. I do not think that, as your wife, I should make you happy, and it is better, is it not, to face these things now, before it is too late to remedy them?"

Marston glanced keenly at her, wondering if it were possible she could know anything of what had taken place that afternoon.

"Am I to understand, then, that you are tired of me, Madeline?" he queried, a little stiffly.

"Not quite that, dear," Madeline returned, smiling bravely into his face, "we must always be good friends, but I think a closer tie might, in time, become irksome, and it would scarcely be wise to risk that, would it?"

Marston took her hand. "I thought you cared for me, Madeline," he said reproachfully.

"I do care for you, Duncan," was the low reply, "you will always be as a dear, dear brother to me."

"But, my dear Madeline—" he was beginning eagerly, when Vera's entrance made him pause. Madeline rose as the girl came into the room.

"I think I must leave you two to amuse each other," she said a little wearily. "My head is still so painful that I fear I am poor company to-night."

Vera put her loving young arms round her aunt's slight form, noticing as she did so, how white and worn the sweet faced looked.

"Dear Love, is the pain very bad?" she questioned tenderly.

"It will be gone to-morrow, my darling," Madeline returned, kissing the upturned face, "the heat has tried me very much to-day. Good-night, my dear one, God bless you," and then, with a gentle "good-night" to Marston she left the room.

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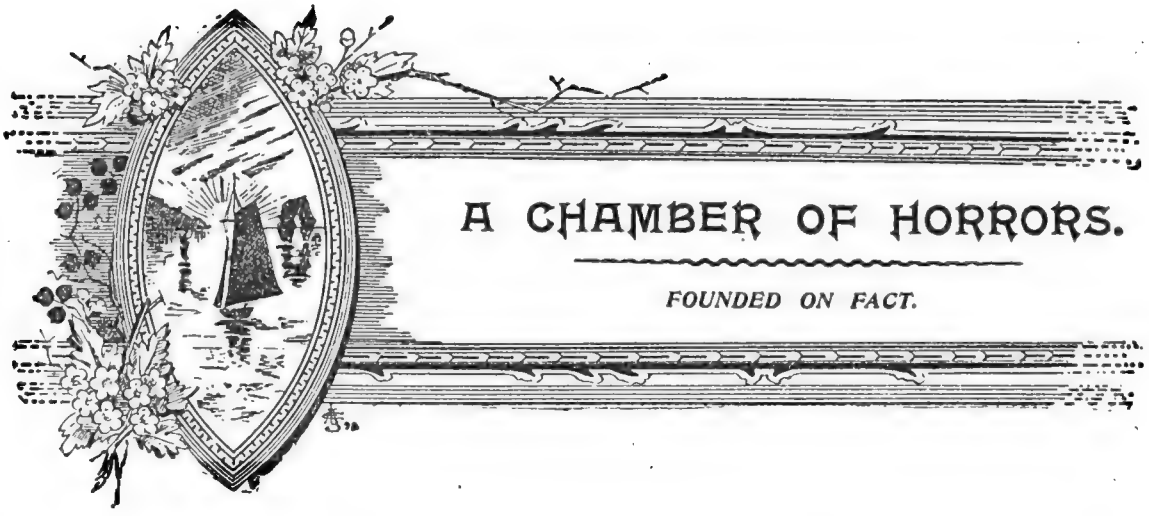

A CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

THERE is a certain house in a certain town known to certain members of the theatrical profession as the "Haunted House."

For many years in the exercise of my calling—the histrionic—I had paid annual visits to this town, but for superstitious reasons had carefully avoided the domicile in question, and sought "diggings" elsewhere. Fortune, it is said, favours but the brave. Hence, on a tempestuous night in an unusually bleak October, I found myself wandering the streets of this afore-mentioned town, roomless, wet and hungry.

My old lodgings had been acquired by other members of our company, and every available set of "comfortable apartments" were "Quite full, sir!"

House after house had I inquired at, till I had made a call at every known address where "theatricals" were taken in and done for. I say "every," but in this I err.

One remained which I knew well, but for that very reason passed uncalled-at. At length, wearied by my unsuccessful search, I paused before it. The familiar shaped card stared me in the face, the legend, "Furnished Apartments," hung invitingly from its lighted windows.

I gazed, I hesitated.

My fears urged me to continue my explorations; my keen sense of physical discomfort pleaded with me to go no further.

"He who hesitates is lost," was again verified in my case, for calling up the sailor's philosophy of "any port in a storm," I ascended the steps and rang the bell.

An elderly woman of somewhat unwashed condition and forbidding physiognomy, after a lapse of some moments, emerged from the lower regions of the domicile, and partially opened the door.

After favouring me with an apparently suspicious inspection of my personal apparel, she asked me what I wanted.

"A bed and sitting room till next Sunday!" was my answer.

"Are you with next week's company?" she inquired, eyeing me once more, as I supposed, with the idea of arriving at the maximum rental it would be advisable to ask for her rooms. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, she motioned me into a large room on the right of the passage.

"I didn't intend to let this week," she said, with another hesitating look. "I'm not very well, but as you're alone, you won't give much trouble. You'd like something to eat, I suppose?"

"I should," I admitted, "but about terms?"

To my surprise, however, the price asked was rather below the average, so we quickly completed our negotiations, and in a few moments I was seated before a substantial meal. My supper was soon disposed of, so, feeling tired after my peregrinations I rang the bell, and on the old woman's re-entering, remarked that if she would show me my room I would retire at once.

For a moment she stared at me without speaking, the same hesitating, uneasy expression on her face I had noted on entering.

At length, finding her tongue, she said the bedroom was not quite ready, and suggested that she should make the fire up, and I amuse myself with a book for half an hour or so, by which time the room would be prepared. Her explanation appeared plausible, so I gave my assent, and was settling myself in the depths of an armchair, when I caught sight of her face. The expression of relief upon it appeared far greater than the occasion warranted.

Back with redoubled force came the superstitious dread with which the house's reputation had filled me, but which for the time being the warmth and light of the sitting-room had dissipated.

What did the woman's confusion point to?

Only that I was to occupy the haunted chamber! For one room alone was said to enjoy practically the monopoly of ghostly visitors. I determined to question her. "Is there anything else wrong with the room?" I asked tremblingly.

"What should there be?" was the reply—spoken almost fiercely—but with a whitening of her cheek, scarcely, I thought, consistent with her tone.

"Why—you see—is—isn't it supposed to be haunted?" I stammered, half ashamed of my fears.

"Haunted? Well, I've heard people as have seen ghosts or what they thought was such, but it's afore my time. Since I've had the house there's been no complaints, and"—with a meaning look at the jug on

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the table—"I hope you won't take too much of that during the week, then I reckon you won't make any either. I trust not, anyways, because I've a hard job to let as it is. Don't look for ghosts is my advice, sir, and depend upon it, you won't see anything worse than yourself."

"But haven't you another room at liberty?"

"No, sir, I haven't," and as if to preclude further questioning, she hastily left the room, leaving me to my reflections. And they were by no means pleasant ones, consisting as they did of the personal reminiscences of sundry of my professional brethren who had—if their statements were to be believed—spent nights of horror in the chamber which awaited me. I remembered, and the fact did not tend to dissipate my fears, that my *confrères'* stories, although varying slightly in detail, in the main incident corresponded. One and all had witnessed the re enactment of the tragedy to which the house owed its evil reputation. They had seen the nebulous form of a woman, stealing cautiously towards the shadowy figure of a man, who stood with his back turned, gazing from the uncurtained window. The woman had placed her arm caressingly round the man's neck, and as his face turned expectantly towards her, with one swift stroke of a glittering razor blade she had cut his throat from ear to ear. The body staggered, but in the act of falling, was caught in the extended arms of the woman, who had dragged it across the floor, and thrusting it into the depths of a huge cupboard, she had melted into the darkness and disappeared.

Was I, too, to be a witness of this ghostly tragedy? I trembled at the thought, but at this moment the landlady entered once more, bearing my candle, and with the information that she would show me to my room. Ashamed to confess my superstitious dread, I signified my willingness to follow, and like a lamb to the slaughter I was conducted to the upper regions. She led the way up an exceedingly broad staircase to a landing from which two or three passages branched. Taking one which turned off sharply to the left, the woman preceded me along a corridor, between two dead walls, to what was apparently a wing of the building entirely isolated from the rest. At the end of the corridor was a single door, which she threw open, and, signifying that my room was within, she left me.

As soon as I was alone I took a hasty survey of my surroundings, and was agreeably surprised to find nothing to add to my fears.

There was no ancient four-poster with catafalque-like hangings—no oriel windows through which the weird light of the moon cast uncanny shadows on the floor—no mouldering tapestry hanging from the walls, with dead and gone warriors worked thereon, and swaying to and fro under the influence of a moaning autumnal wind. No, none of that! The wind was there, certainly, coming in gusts through the joists of an ill-fitting window, but the tapestry wasn't, while in its place was a bilious-looking wall-paper of distinctly modern design. The furniture, too, was in keeping with the paper. Just a small, iron bedstead, with semi-detached brass ornaments—a twelve and sixpenny marble-topped wash-hand stand, whose only claim to antiquity lay in its plentifully besplattered dirt-stains—a chest of drawers, of about equal value, and deficient of a leg, which was efficiently represented by an ancient volume of the church service. These, and a chintz-covered packing-case, surmounted by a cracked mirror, comprised the lot—and a job lot they were! Stay! There was one piece of furniture I had forgotten—a large old-fashioned wardrobe, built into a recess. I had reason to remember this later. At the moment, I thought it a suitable place to hang my overcoat. I tried the door, but finding it locked I crammed the coat within the somewhat limited space of a drawer.

My nervousness had by this time almost entirely left me—due, I presumed, to the most material aspect of the room. Probably, but for my collar stud, it would never have returned, but that stud was my undoing. In extricating it from my shirt band, it slipped from my fingers, and fell to the floor. At one period in my career I should have jumped within the sheets and left it unsought until the morning. Experience had, however, taught me, that a collar-stud not found on the moment of its loss, was a collar-stud lost to its possessor for all time, a thing only to be unearthed from its hiding-place by some future occupant of the chamber who has another, and consequently no immediate, necessity for a second.

In my search I had occasion to remove the rug which lay beside my bed and close to the window. In a moment stud and everything were forgotten in the horror that met my eyes. There upon the uncovered boards was a dark red stain, the nature of which there was no mistaking. It was blood! Blood fresh and bright in colour, as if it had been shed but a few hours. It had sunk into the boards—it had filled the crevices—it had run in little rivulets hither and thither—there must have been pints of it. A sheep might have been slaughtered there, and caused no larger stain—or—Great Heaven—a man! A man who had stood with his back turned, gazing from the uncurtained window!

It was true, then, and this at my feet was the proof of the dark deed—the blood of the murdered, which neither time nor art could efface.

I stood spellbound, gazing upon the fatal spot—stood while one might have counted a hundred, and then turned to fly, preferring to face the rain and wind of the October night, rather than remain in that human slaughter-house.

There was one fact I had completely overlooked: I was quite undressed, so, notwithstanding my fears, I attempted to huddle on my clothing, but my trembling fingers refused their office. Then my terrors got the better of me, and giving it up in despair, I sprang into bed, and buried my head under the clothes.

How long I lay awake, trembling, I know not. It seemed hours. Finally, I must have fallen asleep, for when I awoke, the candle, which I perfectly remembered leaving alight, had burnt itself out, and save for the light of a particularly sickly-looking moon, the room was in darkness.

I had omitted to draw the blind, consequently that portion of the room adjacent to the window was lit up by the moon-rays, the remainder was in deeper shadow. What caused me to awake I cannot say, probably the weight of clothes upon my head. The first sound which greeted my awakening senses was that of a neighbouring clock striking the hour of midnight—the hour, upon the authority of Hamlet, "When churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead." At the same time, my eyes fell upon the dark spot on the floor, upon which the moon was shining. As I gazed, the mental picture I had drawn of the dead and gone crime took shape—the hideous phantasmagoria of the dark deed unrolled itself before me.

I saw the dim outline of a man emerge from the shadows beyond, and stand motionless, gazing from the uncurtained window. I saw another shadow-like form, in the shape of a woman, steal towards him with arms extended, as if about to confer a caress. The arm slowly

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encircled the man's neck, his face turned reciprocatingly towards her. Something glittered for a moment in the moon-rays, and then sank into the white throat, and with one swift stroke hacked its way through flesh and sinew. I saw the head fall back helplessly and blood appear, spurting out in jets, and streaming to the floor, into which it sank, dying the boards with its crimson stain. I saw the man's arms fly up, as if in mute appeal to Heaven—saw him stagger and fall forward, into the arms of the woman, who bore him slowly backward, till she reached the huge wardrobe. I saw her with difficulty thrust him into it, and double-lock the doors upon him, then, with one cautious glance round, fade slowly away into the darkness.

The dark stain upon the floor alone remained. I felt instinctively that what I had witnessed was but a vision of my mind's eye, yet everything was so real that I knew sleep was impossible till I had satisfied myself of its unreality. The cupboard alone could satisfy that, so I resolved to explore its recesses. I dragged my shaking limbs from the bed, reeled towards it, and shook it violently.

It was of course locked as before. No matter. It must open! I pulled and wrenched, till the screws tore themselves free from the frail and rotten woodwork, and the doors flew suddenly apart.

As they came open, something that had been huddled up within fell outward, full upon me; it bore me to the ground with its crushing weight.

It rolled over me, conveying a coldness as of the grave by its icy touch. I sprang to my feet in an ecstasy of terror, and thrust it from me. It fell within the band of light cast by the moon, and then I saw what it was. Oh Heaven, the horror of it! It was the body of a dead man, with his throat cut from ear to ear!

With a wild cry for help I rushed to the door. The long corridor was before me, dark and silent. It mattered not! Human society lay beyond! I turned to fly, but as I did so my foot caught in a mat, and I fell prostrate. For a time all was oblivion.

When I came to myself a doctor was bending over me. Beside him stood the landlady listening shamefacedly to his angry reproaches—reproaches in which, when I heard the medical man's explanation, I felt well inclined to join.

It appeared that on the morning of the day of my arrival, her son, a worthless reprobate, had, in a fit of delirium, committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. He had occupied the room in which I was placed, and at the moment of my arrival his body was lying in the bed in which I was to have slept.

The woman had not intended to let, but her cupidity being aroused at the unexpected opportunity, and my being alone, she had thrust the body within the cupboard, intending to remove it on the morrow, when she knew I should be at the theatre unpacking.

The re-enactment of the tragedy was, of course, the result of imagination, doubtless conjured up by my discovery of the blood upon the floor.

However, I had had enough of the "Haunted House," so, as soon as I could decently intrude, I went to the rooms of another member of our company, and begged him to allow me to share them with him. He consented readily enough, though, had he refused, and nothing offered but the pavement for a bed, and the dark vault of Heaven for a roof, I would have chosen them, rather than have spent another night in what had been to me a veritable "Chamber of Horrors!"

HUBERT BARTLETT.

£100 OFFERED THIS WEEK. £100

This week the Editor of SHORT STORIES addresses 100 envelopes to 100 people in various parts of the country. Inside each envelope he places a sovereign and locks them away in his private safe.

SIMPLY TAKE A POST-CARD

and address it to the Editor under the following conditions: Ask if a sovereign has been addressed to you, giving your full name and address clearly written in ink.

One hundred names and addresses have been picked out at random from directories, etc., etc.

No sovereign, however, will be awarded unless it is applied for, so it would be advisable for you to tell your friends to drop us a post-card, whether they are readers or not.

All applications for No. 13 distribution must reach us by January 3rd, addressed to The 13th Sovereign Editor, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Each application must be made separately.

Result of Distribution No. 10.

THREE of the fifty people for whom sovereigns have been set aside have applied for them this week. They are:

M. J. Adams, 94 Alcombe Road, Northampton.
Miss Mulliner, 71 Granleigh Road, Leytonstone.
W. H. Proctor, School Board Offices, Congleton, Cheshire.

The unclaimed money was addressed to:

C. Hurdlo, 68 Church Road, Upper Norwood, S.E.; A. Jenkins, 45 Vue Road, Brighton; Thos. Simon, 13 Hauteville, Guernsey; W. G. Harris, Upper Street, Shere, near Guildford; F. H. Parker, "Wensley," Manor Road, Wallington, Surrey; J. Shain, Longfellow House, 29a Palmerston Road, Bowes Park, N.; Miss Warwick, 16 Cornfield Terrace, Eastbourne; H. J. Taylor, Collegiate School, Glastonbury, Somerset; G. F. Matthews, 20 West Street, Chichester; F. Glancy, Eaton's Lane, Boyle, Ireland; F. Martin, 4 Edith Villas, Newmarket; T. Youngs, Stowupland Street, Stowmarket, Suffolk; Mrs. Ker, 23 Falkland Road, Egremont, Liverpool; Alf. Jester, 22 Eridge Road, Tunbridge Wells; J. Wilson, Carr House, Seaton Carew, Durham; R. Robson, 35 Croydon Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne; J. F. Boyle, 53 Queen Street, Clonmel; J. Osborne, Main Street, Brampton, Cumberland; Mrs. Clowes, Holly Hill, Bowness-on-Windermere; Geo. Patterson, 24 Suffolk Street, Helensburgh, N.B.; J. Kish, 24 Galloway Street, Maxwelltown, Dumfries; Alex. Macrae, 8 Francis Street, Stornoway, The Outer Hebrides; Mrs. Powell, Panycoed, St. Clears, South Wales; P. R. Day, 18 Bloomsbury Square, W.C.; Thos. Olley, 8 Bristol Mews, Paddington, W.; Mark Beck, Bull's Head Lane, Stoke, Warwickshire; H. Ackland, Postmaster, Lundy Island; Jas. Lemin, 9 Fore Street, Redruth; Mrs. Adams, 2 West End Avenue, Harrogate; J. Quayle, 10 Wade Street, Leeds; T. Briggs, Hollows House, Little Town, Liversedge; Thos. Richardson, Sawtry, Peterborough; W. Jackson, Langham, Oakham; Thos. Day, 16 Church Road, Willesden, N.W.; Alf Young, 47 Alkham Road, Stoke Newington, N; John Andrews, 6 Park Hill Road, Bromley; H. Allberry, 49 Mount Ararat Road, Richmond, Surrey; Mrs. Wilson, 94 Wellesley Road, Gunnersbury; A. Campbell, King Street, Hammersmith; Miss Noakes, 15 Hastings Road, Maidstone, Kent; A. Allen, 41 Commercial Street, Hereford; T. Altham, 3 Princess Street, Nelson; F. Brown, 19 Castle Street, Reading, Berks; F. C. Burnham, Maidenhead, Berks; Mrs. Mundy, 163 Walton Street, St. Thomas's, Oxford; J. Knight, Harrold, Bedford; H. Brooks, 5 Manchester Road, Hyde, Cheshire.

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE.
Author of "The Adventures of Captain Kettle," etc., etc.

BOOK I.—CONCERNING THE FLIGHT FROM CULLODEN MOOR.

SUMMARY.

A MAJOR and a cornet of Sheridan's Horse seek refuge in the wilds of Lochaber after the battle of Culloden Moor. They are joined by another refugee, Murtagh O'Neill. The major succumbs to wounds received in the engagement, and a troop of heavy cavalry discover the hiding place of the remaining two fugitives, and give chase to them.

CHAPTER III.

How the five dragoons were outwitted; how Murtagh O'Neill provided doe-venison; how the two reconnoitred; how the flood-tide flows in S. Peter's Strait; and how a trading cutter was requisitioned without the usual formalities.

ALL throughout the chase snow or sleet had been coming down apace, but when O'Neill looked round, he saw that a snowstorm was driving up with the wind such as would put all previous efforts to scorn. He told Sneyd of this, and added, "Run two more minutes, yer honour, for all you're worth, and then I promise yez a halt." At the same time he slightly increased his own pace, and Sneyd, helped by the lead—as one always is, when running—puffed and panted in his wake, spurting most pluckily.

The clouds of downy flakes came down with racing speed, and enveloped all in their folds. O'Neill looked back. "Another half-minute," he said, "an' they'll have lost the sight of us." Then, directly afterwards, turning sharply to his right, he motioned Sneyd to stop, and pulled him down under the cover of a clump of juniper bushes. "They'll hide your honour nicely," he said. "Lie low, an' let the sodjers pass yez. I'll stay here. When they've gone by, an' we've got our winds again, we'll be up an' off across the strame. There's wood over yonder, an' once in it, they might as well search for diamonds in the Bog of Allen as try to find us there."

Sneyd crouched as he was directed, and presently heard the dragoons' heavy boots going past—*crush, crish, crush,* through the slushy peat soil. One, two, three, he counted; then four; and then, after a pause, five. These went stolidly on into the blinding storm, and were lost to hearing in the distance. There had been six in the first batch, so another should come up. But as minute after minute passed and he did not put in an appearance, the cornet concluded that the man had turned back.

O'Neill had evidently arrived at the same conclusion, for just then he started to his feet, and beckoning his companion, started off at a steady jog-trot, directly down-hill. Sneyd followed, and presently they came to the Ree, swollen by the morning's rains, but still not up to mid-thigh. The water was bitterly cold, but they were soon across it, and were pressing through the thick bushy undergrowth on the opposite bank.

Presently the trees around them became taller, and in a short while they entered a regular forest.

There was little chance of the dragoons following them here. In summer, what with hazels and other bushes, the place would have been well-nigh impassable; and, even now, the tree-trunks and bare branches were often set so thickly as to bar a straight passage. Rocks, too, jutting out from the surface, frequently necessitated a considerable detour. So that there was small probability that anyone but an experienced woodsman could follow their trail, even if he had been fortunate enough to pick it up. But, for all that, they did not come to a halt. The neighbourhood was too dangerous to stay in. When the storm had passed, and the soldiers did not see them elsewhere, they would most assuredly scour the wood. So the pair of them kept on at a good sharp walk, holding, as nearly as they could, a line parallel to the coast.

Steering amongst trees, when the sky is overcast, and a snowstorm is raging, would not be an easy task, but for

one thing. If the wind remains fairly constant, one can set a fair course by it, failing a better guide. O'Neill, who had been a sailor, knew this. "And," said he, "we'll just hold on, yer honour, for six good Irish miles av the cover lasts, an' then we may sit ourselves down an' feel that we're in safety."

"And if we find ourselves out of the wood?" suggested Sneyd.

"Why, then, we'll hark back a hundred yards or so, an' dig a burrow of some sort there. Any way, there's nothing like a plantin' o' this kind for a bhoy to hide in when he's wanted. It's me own father that stowed away for two years in a ten-acre patch on the back of the Kesh mountain, wid twenty goulden guineas on his head. 'Twas a powerful sum of money, yer honour, wasn't it? I mind me the ould man used to sigh an' say he'd give information on himself blythely, av they could only promise to let him have the spendin' of the money when he came to be a ghost. But he couldn't figure out how that was to be done nohow, an' so at last he gives it up in despair, and just turns tail and runs away, and settles down peaceably in Galway. Howly saints! it's another climb we have before us. Awful mountainous this, yer honour, isn't it, for just a counthry place?"

Sneyd crouched as he was directed.

They had passed over on to the side of the hill which slopes away to the loch, and were keeping in a line more or less parallel to the shore. Now, the timber is gapped; but then, it was mostly as nature had planted it; and at the end of their six-mile tramp they were still in cover. They had come into a forest of Scotch firs, which ran from the Callart shore away up and up to that altitude which is known as the "tree-line;" and in its dark and melancholy aisles they found a safe asylum. Pushing through the thick covers had been a work of time, and, by the hour they brought up, it was nearly dusk.

The interlacing foliage above formed a dense canopy which, even in sunshine, on a clear day, threw the brown needle-strewn ground below into shadowy twilight; but now that the dark evergreens bore a deep burden of snow, save for the dim radiance which struggled through an interstice here and there, all was a deep and murky gloom. A pine wood, with its stiff straight trunks, and its desolate lower branches of dead wood, is never a cheering sight at the best of times. It will induce a gentle melancholy even in our liveliest hours; but when one's fortune is as those of these two fugitives were, the place is depressing in the extreme. Even O'Neill felt its influence. "'Tis worse than a wake widout the whisky, yer honour," he said. "But a man can get used to anything if he only lives long enough to learn, as me uncle said when the hangman hurt his ear wid the rope; and so here goes for buildin' a cabin."

A fork formed by two prone-lying giant trunks offered them a commencement, and by piling up branches and turf, and by scraping away the thick layers of mouldering woody *débris* from underneath, they had, in half-an-hour's time, a hut as snug as could be wished for, with a fire of resinous fir-cones and branches crackling merrily in front of them.

Now, fir-cones certainly do burn well, but they are not appetising to the palate even when roasted; and pineneedles make an excellent couch, but no one would dream of taking them internally; and now that kitchen, fireplace, and bedroom had been prepared, the two wanderers began to think keenly of supper. As Sneyd truly remarked, they were not likely to find a sheep there, and for his own part, he didn't see what on earth they were to do for a meal, except make up their minds to go without.

But O'Neill was more sanguine. "It's far too big a pain I've got in me belly to go to sleep," said he, "an', wid yer honour's lave, I'm off to forage for something to aise it with."

"If you think there's anything to be got, I'll come too."

"Wid due respect, best not," replied the Irishman. "Bad cess to me bringing up, there's a poaching cross in me blood, an' wid a night as dark as the inside of a haythen nigger, I'd be able to find me way about. Now yer honour'd be different. Once nicely away from the camp here, an' it's all Fermanagh to a Connemara stone-heap yez wouldn't be back till morning, if then. Just stay an' toast yer toes

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an' yer breeks at the fire, an' before yez can boast of a dry shirt to yer back, 'tis back I'll be av there's anything creeping widin three miles of us."

So, taking the pistols and recharging them carefully, the Irishman strode off into the darkness, and Sneyd, keenly anxious to contribute his share to the household comfort, climbed one of the slighter firs, and cutting from it a number of branches, stripped the thinner shoots from these, and arranged them on the floor of the hut, thereby forming a couple of luxurious, springy couches.

Meanwhile the storm howled remorselessly on. The more slender pine trunks swayed perpetually, and even the older and larger trees occasionally deigned to bow to the heavier squalls. Every now and again some branch, insufficiently buttressed up by its fellows, would crash down, and, letting fall an avalanche of snow, leave a window in the close-groined roof to light it in its descent.

Sneyd had but slender hope that the Irishman would be able to meet with any food, and at any rate did not expect him back for a considerable time; and so, when a man appeared close beside him, having advanced unnoticed over the soft carpet of pine needles, he instinctively sprang to his feet, and laid a ready hand upon his sword-hilt. However, a cheery "All right, yer honour," reassured him, and he recognised his new comrade. The latter threw a burden from his shoulders to the ground. "That's a year-old doe," he said. "I came upon her upwind and unawares, broke her foreleg with a pistol shot, and then closed in and used my dirk. Red deer meat's just the thing for us."

He had commenced skinning the animal as he was speaking, and soon had it denuded of its pelt. Then he eviscerated it, and proceeded to cut the flesh from the loin. After arranging the hot embers of the fire to suit his taste, he fashioned a couple of forked sticks to serve as grids, and giving Sneyd one, with instructions how to use it, he took the other himself, and followed suit.

The smell of roasting flesh rose on the cold night air, and Sneyd thought it the sweetest odour that had ever assailed his nostrils. He had not realised before, how hungry he was. And when his piece of meat was cooked enough to suit his fancy—rather underdone, I fear it was—he tackled it with his teeth, and felt that he had never known what it was to enjoy a meal before. That there was no salt, no bread, no plate, or knife and fork, little recked he. An empty belly wants none of these things to tempt it. Solid food is then in itself the height of luxury.

He instinctively sprang to his feet and laid a ready hand on his sword hilt.

The pair of them ate to repletion, and, at the end of the meal, they laid themselves down on the springy beds of pine branches, and ruminated silently. O'Neill enjoyed the last pipeful of his tobacco. Sneyd mused dreamily for awhile over the events of the last few weeks, and then dropped off to sleep. The other puffed at his pipe, down to its last ashes, and dropped off also. And the pair of them snored in concert.

The sun was showing high through the pines when the ex-cornet of Sheridan's Horse next opened his eyes. The storm had ceased. Part of the snow was still perched on the branches overhead, but the most of it had either melted where it was, or fallen in small lumps to the earth. A dim, quiet light stole through the tree-tops and fell on the needle-strewn ground. But the view was still circumscribed. Whichever way one might look, straight brown trunks closed in the vista. Everything was a shade of brown—tree-trunks, dead branches, needles, cones—save for the dark green feathery branches overhead, and the few small patches of blue sky and fleecy cloud which here and there showed between them.

O'Neill was still lying open-mouthed on his back, snoring peacefully. He was a man of about the middle height,

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very squarely built, and heavily boned. There was no superfluous flesh upon him, yet a casual spectator would have called him fat, because of the wideness of his frame. He was one of those men who look strong, and who are a great deal more powerful than they appear. His face was typical of his country—with wide straight mouth, short tip-tilted nose, and merry blue eyes. There was sandy red hair on his head, and a red stubble on cheeks, upper lip, and chin. Artistically speaking, the man was no beauty, but his was a pleasant face, and a face that one would instinctively trust.

Remembering how little sleep the man had had of late, Sneyd did not wake him, especially as there was no reason why either of them should turn out just then. A fire would be dangerous in the daytime, as the blue smoke rising above the trees would betray their whereabouts; and, besides, they had cooked enough venison overnight to serve them for breakfast. No, there was absolutely no need to rise just then, and Sneyd himself was not loath to indulge in a still longer rest.

The Irishman opened his eyes at last, and, after making a meal of some of their cold meat, the pair of them fell to discussing what should be their next move.

"We're fairly safe from pursuit here at present, I take it," said Sneyd, "but we can't stay where we are for ever. I haven't much notion as to whereabouts we may be, but there are certain to be people in the neighbourhood, and sooner or later they must discover us."

"Sorra doubt about it, yer honour. What'll we do?"

"Slip cautiously down to the edge of the wood and reconnoitre."

"But why not reconnoitre from here?"

"Because we can't see through the trees."

"Thrue for yez; but we can see over 'em. Wait now. 'Tisn't every one of these trees I'd be afther sayin' I could climb, for there's many of them as big as a hogshead o' potheen in girth; an' though the bark's rough, it 'ud give way av yez swayed on it wid yer fingers. But see now, there's a thin chap there, an' av yez notice, his upper branches interlace wid the big fellow next door to him. So ye see, yer honour, I can swarm the wee fellow, lay out along the yard, in a manner of speaking, and then go hand-over fi-t up the rigging right up into the sky."

Sneyd nodded acquiescence, and the Irishman did as he had suggested, scrambling up with a seaman's activity, and pushing through a screen of the feathery dark green branches which closed after his passage and hid him from sight. He stayed up some ten or fifteen minutes, and then rejoined Sneyd on the ground.

"Well?" inquired the latter.

"Well, yer honour, the coach for the first stage is waiting for us to give the word to have horses put to and start. There's a loch* below us, wid an island† that holds a graveyard in the middle, an' a wee village on the other side. This side there's a sort o' low spit o' land running out, wid half-a-dozen houses on it; an' on the lee of that, there's a boat drawn up that's fit to carry us anywhere in rayson amongst the islands till we can come by a bigger."

"Then," said Sneyd, "as there's nothing to be done till nightfall, we may as well lie down again and snatch all the rest we can; there's no knowing when the next chance may come."

With that they settled themselves down on their beds once more, and dozed the day through. Night began to close in soon after four o'clock, and, as this was far too early to attempt their enterprise, they got the fire alight once more, and set to cooking all the remaining venison, partly as a meal for the present, partly as a provision for the future. There was no knowing how long their cruise might last, or how next they would be able to revictual themselves.

* Loch Leven.

† St. Mungo's Island. Burials still take place there.

He stayed up some ten or fifteen minutes.

About ten o'clock they moved leisurely down to the edge of the forest, struck the road which runs along the loch shore, and walked along it, holding themselves in readiness to dart into cover the moment any wayfarer put in an appearance. However, none seemed to be abroad, and the place was extremely desolate. They reached the shore where the boat lay, about midnight, and set to getting her in the water as quietly as possible. She was laden with herring nets, and these they left on the shingle. There was no need to take more than they wanted. Some people might have said that running off with the boat was nothing more nor less than robbery; but it must be remembered that fugitive soldiers, flying away to save their lives, are not apt to be straitlaced about such matters. The boat herself was not valuable—a rotten old craft of the skimming-dish pattern, with a couple of rude oars, and no other tackle—but, failing a better, she would serve their purpose. So they got in, and shoved off.

The tide was pretty slack in the bight where she lay, so with the two clumsy fisherman's oars they made fair way; but, once round the point, the full force of a fierce flood met them, and the boat steadfastly refused to make headway.

"Idjut that I was not to have known it!" muttered O'Neill. "The whole inner loch empties an' fills through this narrow gut, an' the water's racing in now like a mill-sluice. The ebb'll begin to make in a couple of hours, an' av I'd only had sense to wait, we'd ha' gone out then like a musket-shot."

However, by holding close in to the shore, they kept in the deader water, missing the full strength of the tide, which runs hardest in mid-channel, and by slow degrees

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They . . . set to getting her in the water.

they worked the cumbersome old boat along. The strain was intense, but both stuck doggedly to the task, and brought every muscle to bear.

But ill fate awaited them. In the midst of one of his hardest pulls, the blade of Sneyd's oar caught in a tangle of seaweed, and he tumbled heels over head into the bottom of the boat, with the loom broken off short at the thole-pin.

Round came the boat like a walnut-shell in a flooded gutter, darting into mid-channel, and shooting straight down towards the inner loch. There was no spare oar on board, and, with the remaining one, they were helpless to turn her up against the stream. O'Neill shifted his heavy oar to the stern rowlock, so as to have some command over the boat in case of need.

Neither spoke. The current had got them helplessly in tow. Words could not improve matters, and so both remained grimly silent. They swept on past the Green Island and into the broader loch, and there the force of the stream was more or less dissipated. O'Neill headed the boat in towards St. Mungo's Island as though he were going to land there, but Sneyd, who was sitting on the forethwart peering through the darkness, said to him in a loud whisper, "Look over there to your right; wouldn't that craft suit us better? She's larger than this, at any rate."

"Yer honour's right, an' av we can get her we'll slip down wid the ebb in an hour's time, an' be able to cruise where we please. Kape quiet now, av yez plaze, and I'll lay this ould wreck alongside."

The vessel which had attracted their attention was a little coasting cutter of some ten or twelve tons; undecked, save for a small cuddy forward. O'Neill sculled his boat cleverly and quietly across to her, and, as he lay her on board, Sneyd made fast his painter round the cutter's starboard runner, and jumped quickly over the side.

Rapid as he was, O'Neill was before him. Hastening forward the Irishman made fast the little forehatch, and then came aft to Sneyd, who was standing on a heap of stones amidships, not knowing exactly what to do.

"It's in ballast she is, yer honour, an' so we may guess she's come in here for freight of some kind or other. If her people are on board, I've got 'em all snugly under hatches forrard. We can't risk the din of a scrimmage. If there ain't anybody, well an' good; if there be, why we can talk to 'em when we get fairly to sea. Meanwhile, we must just sit snugly down here on the ballast till the ebb begins to make, an' no body ashore'll be the wiser about our bein' aboard."

"And how shall we get out?"

"This ways, yer honour. Wind's fair for the narrows. As soon as she swings we'll get the anchor, an' let her drop down a quarter of a mile or so under bare poles. The breeze is stiff enough to give her steerage-way wid that, an' 'twould be risky to get any canvas on her here. Blocks will squeak, and if they did someone ashore might be poking his nose out of doors to see what we was after. But I'll get everything ready for hoisting, and as soon as we're nicely out of earshot we'll give her the canvas, an' be off an' away as fast as we can tear."

"Can you take her out through the narrows?"

"Wid any dacent luck, yer honour, yes. There'll likely be a bar, but, wid the tide almost bang full, there should be lashins of water for a wee boat like this. And then, once outside, we must find our way along as best we can. Yez have no notion, I suppose, where we should steer to?"

"Not an atom. The poor old Major headed down here on the strength of a rumour that the Prince's vessel was still in these waters. But where exactly she is supposed to be lying he didn't know, and neither do I."

"'Tis a bad lookout that, yer honour. The coasts hereaway is a regular maze of islands, so I've heard tell, an' 'twould be a hunt for a needle in a bundle of hay, I fear, to go after her haphazard. However, we may pick up tidings. And if we don't, well we'll look after ourselves somehow. 'Twill go hard av a couple of able-bodied men—beggin' your honour's pardon for couplin' meself wid yez—with a stout little boat to their feet, either starve or get caught, when they don't want to do either."

"Oh," said Sneyd, laughing, "I wasn't in a funk at all. I don't doubt but what we'll pull through somehow, thanks to your skill. But still, it is best to have a definite plan, if possible. Can I give a hand at what you are doing?"

"Much obliged, yer honour, but it isn't worth while. It's just castin' off the tyers from the mainsail I am, an' there is but two. The forestaysail is lying on the deck there, wid the sheets ready bent on; an' the jib's stopped out along the bowsprit wid spunyarn, so that a good bowst on the halyards'll break it adrift aisy. We're all ready now when the tide serves."

"What about victualling?"

"Begob, I'd forgotten that. There's that bundle of deer's meat lying in the stern thwart of the other boat. No, sit you still, yer honour, I'll get it. See, there it is. I'll stow it in this locker aft. Here's a breaker, as I live! Ach, wather! and it's meself that'd forfeit me ten days' beard for just one wee half 'un o' potheen. Oh, wirra, wirra, 'tis a sad world this. I wonder what they've got stowed away in the wee cuddy there forard?"

"A rug or two maybe, and a regiment of fleas. But look, isn't she beginning to turn—what do you call it—swing?"

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"Yer honour's right. It must be dead wather now. The ebb'll begin to make in ten minutes or so; an' when her nose turns nicely towards the narrows, we'll trip the anchor an' be off. I'll go forard and heave it short-a-peak, ready."

He got on to the little foredeck as he spoke, and began hauling in the hempen cable; and Sneyd, eager to be of some use, went after him, and was in the very act of laying hold on the rope behind him, when suddenly he leant down with a hand to his ear, and listened attentively.

"Hark!" he whispered, after a moment's pause, and the Irishman took a turn with the cable round the bitts, and listened too. "Isn't there somebody moving about ashore, over yonder? There they are again—rattling something over the stones."

"Be the powers, yer honour's right. 'Tis a boat they're shovin' down. There, hear the splash? Now they're heavin' a pair of oars into her. Here, give a hand at the cable. It's up and down, and the bottom's holding fast."

"They're rowing this way."

"The chaps that own the cutter coming to take her out with the ebb, by all that's blue. Heave on the cable, yer honour, for all your worth, or we must cut it. Come now—Yer-huh-he! Again now—Yer-ha-ha-hee! Hurroosh, there she comes; in wid her now, handsomely. Now, then, up staysail—there, she's away, steering herself like a witch. Up mainsail now. There's the throat-halyards. Rattle 'em in, up peak, and handsomely does it. Bad cess to it; there, she's coming up to the wind. Tumble aft, yer honour, and take the tiller. Hard a-weather wid it. No! to t'other side. That's right. There now, she has the mainsail. Helm amidships again, an' keep her steady so, whiles I run up the jib. There now, yer honour, give me the tiller, an' do you reprime your pistols. We mayn't want 'em, but 'tis best not to have 'em just flash if we do."

The boat astern had crept out from the shadow of the land leisurely enough. But, when she was in the open water, the man sitting in the stern made some remark which caused the two rowers to rest on their oars and turn round. They saw the cutter getting under weigh apparently of her own accord, and for the nonce their superstitious fears got the better of them. But when they got sight of two very substantial ghosts flitting about and hoisting canvas with all the speed they were capable of, then did those two rowers turn round and bend their backs to their work in downright earnest. Who the midnight pirates were, they probably had no idea; but, for all that, they were not animated by any particular love for them, and had a great desire to come up and argue for possession of the little vessel at close quarters.

At first the boat came up hand over fist. The breeze was light, and the clumsy little cutter moved but slowly through the water. The two fugitives saw this, and quickly held themselves and their weapons in readiness. There was a battering from the under side of the flimsy forecastle hatch which showed that they might also have other foes to contend with. But, to discourage the efforts of these last, Sneyd piled a good three hundredweight of stone on the little scuttle, and then came aft again.

The boat was still gaining upon them, but she was coming up more slowly. A stern chase is proverbially a long one, and the rowers were tiring after their first furious spurt; besides, their craft was heavy and tubby, and more intended to live in a heavy sea than to be pulled rapidly over smooth water. But notwithstanding this, it was unmistakable that she was drawing up, and as the men in her had settled down to a steady, dogged stroke, and were rowing as if they could keep it up for a week—or less—the chances seemed to point to their gaining their end in time. That is, if the wind did not freshen—as it appeared to have not the smallest intention of doing.

What the result would have been had the two parties come into collision, there could have been little doubt. Sneyd and O'Neil were both armed with lethal weapons, and were accustomed to using them. The others probably had their sailors' knives, and the boat's oars. They were three to one, certainly, but they would not have stood a chance.

The two fugitives had no fears on that score. They simply wished to avoid a combat, as wise men always will, when there is nothing to be gained by it. They had no grudge against the men they were depriving of their boat, and, besides, they wished to pass as ordinary thieves, and not to be recognised—even on suspicion—as fugitives from Culloden.

So when the wind, which is proverbially fickle, broke its promise of remaining light, and came down from the hills with some freshness, they rejoiced exceedingly, and saw the boat drop astern with feelings that were distinctly the reverse of regretful.

And so the little cutter and her freight passed through St. Peter's Strait with the first of the ebb, and ran down past Port na Mearlach and Ardshiel Point into broad Loch Linnhe.

CHAPTER IV.

How the boy came out of the forepeak; how he volunteered to pilot; and how the cruise to France was planned.

"Yer honour will know nothing of the mariner's trade?" O'Neill observed tentatively, when the cutter was well through the narrows into the open lake.

"Practically speaking, nothing. I can handle an oar and steer a row-boat, but that's all; so the sooner I set about learning the better 'twill be for me."

So Lawrence Sneyd received instruction in the noble art of steering a cutter with the wind free, and with Murtagh O'Neill at hand to prevent mistakes, he contrived not to execute an unpremediated jibe, or any other similarly objectionable manœuvre.

But, by the time they had rounded Ardshiel Point, the question of escaping from pursuit had been merged in that of where to go next. They had little fear of being overhauled; but their future course was a puzzle to them. Atlases were not as common on shore in those days as they are now, and neither had anything beyond a very vague notion of the topography of the neighbourhood which he found himself in.

When questioned upon the point, O'Neill scratched his red poll, with dubious forefinger. "'Twould be dangerous to go ashore and beg pilotage, for the wee craft is nigh certain to be known, and we'd be laid hands on an' strung up as pirates, without parley. An' 'tis dangerous work boxing about in these narrow waters. We might pick up a reef at any moment, in spite of the shrewdest look-out. 'Twill be bad enough in the daytime, but at night 'twould be impossible to go on. We must contrive to fetch up to an anchor somewhere."

"Then you think it impossible to find the Prince's ship, even if she be here?"

The Irishman looked around him, and shrugged his shoulders. Sneyd followed his glance, and saw the hopelessness of such a search, situated as they were. The other continued: "O' course, yer honour, we might blunder on her, in a manner of speaking unexpectedly, an' then all would be well! but I think a search is out of the question."

"Then what would you suggest?"

"This, yer honour. There are islands all down the coast. Let us work our way slowly and carefully down inside them till we make the North of Ireland. When we get down by the Mull of Cantyre I shall know my way, for I've been South from Rathlin Island often; and once there, we can make further plans. Of course, we shall have to pick our way down carefully, so as not to blunder on to any reefs of shoals, though the danger would be more to the little cutter than ourselves. I'd say, get outside everything and sail her down in the blue water, but unless we were

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"Are you Sandy Carmichael?"

forced to it, that would be over venturesome. The wee boat is badly found for aught save simple coasting. She's neither chart that I can see, nor compass, nor lead, nor log ship."

"There may be something in the little cabin in the bows there. And, by Jove, there was some one in it!"

"By the powers, yer honour's right, an' it's meself that had forgotten him too. Have a care," he added, as Sneyd commenced pitching overboard the stones which he had piled on the forehatch, "there may be more than wan."

"All right," said Sneyd, slipping back a corner of the hatch and then sitting on it. "Hullo, below there! How many are there of ye?"

"There's nane but me," responded a voice.

"And who are you?"

"Sandy Carmichael, sir, an' I hope ye will na hurt me."

"Well, come up, Sandy Carmichael, and let's have a look at you," said Sneyd, slipping off the hatch altogether, and standing back upon his guard.

Forthwith up scrambled a small boy, with a prematurely old face, who tugged respectfully at a tattered bonnet which was pulled down well over his ears, and waited to be addressed.

Sneyd laughed. "Are you Sandy Carmichael?"

"Yes, sir."

"And is there no one else below there?"

"No, sir."

"And what did you make such a tremendous row for when we were getting under weigh?"

"Because the skipper's hard o' hearin', sir, an' he always licks me if I don't wake of me own accord."

"Who is the skipper?"

"Duncan Carmichael, sir."

"Your father?"

"No, sir."

"Uncle, then?"

"No, sir; he says he's my owner. He picked me up in a boat off the Irish coast when I was a wee bairn."

"H'm, wonder what you are now? Well, Sandy, we've run away with the cutter, and as you happened to be in it, we ran away with you too."

"Yes, sir."

"I hope you don't mind?"

The boy gave a short, hard laugh, which passed like a spasm across his face, leaving it stolid and wooden as before.

"No, I don't mind," he said.

"What are you laughing at?" Sneyd asked.

"'Cause you ask if I minded leavin' Duncan Carmichael, sir."

"Why, what was he like?"

"A brute, sir."

The boy said this without emotion. He made the statement as if it were a simple fact which could not be controverted; and Sneyd, after staring at him for a moment or two in surprise, slipped through the hatch into the forecastle. It was a grimy, malodorous little den, littered untidily with all sorts of odds and ends—ropes, blocks, pieces of mildewed sailcloth. In one angle was a rusty stove, with an iron pot hung beside it. On the bottom timbers of the boat were a couple of creel-fuls of peats. These were obviously intended as fuel. Meanwhile they served instead of floorboards in moderately light weather; though, when the cutter heeled over at all, it is probable that they all piled themselves up to leeward. Of food, there was not a vestige.

Sneyd put his head through the hatch again, glad to breath pure air once more. The boy had gone aft, and was staring solemnly at O'Neill. He was attired in a pair of short wide trousers of coarse grimy canvas, and a tattered coat of dark brown homespun. His legs were bare to the knee; his throat was bare and brown, and his shock of yellow hair was covered, as I have said, with a Scotch bonnet, pulled well down to the ears. As Sneyd came on deck the boy uttered a remark which gained him O'Neill for a friend at once.

"There's 'bacca in the locker you're sittin' on," he said.

The Irishman's pipe was out, filled, and lit, in less than a minute. "Sandy, boy," he said, "there's the makin's of a man in yez, av yez don't die of ould age before you're grown up. Laugh a bit, can't yez?"

The boy's face never moved a muscle. "I've forgotten how to laugh," he said. "Duncan Carmichael says it's wrong, an' used to welt me for laughin' when I was a bairn. So I dropped it."

"Well, you're a rum handful, you are. Hullo, here's his

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honour out again. Well, sir, an' did yez find anything worth packin' in a have-her-sack?"

"Nothing that I should fancy. Say, Sandy, what do you live upon here?"

"Fish, sir."

"Got any aboard?"

"No, sir. Catch 'em as we want 'em. Lines and hooks is in the after locker."

"H'm. That seems a primitive sort of proceeding. And supposing the fish don't bite?"

"Then we wait till they does, sir, an' has a drink o' water to stay the stomach with."

"Well, that beats all my goin' a-fishin'," exclaimed O'Neill. "And does your guv'nor—what's his name?—Duncan Carmichael—does he put up wid that sort o' livin', or does he have a dhrap o' the hard stuff to wash it down?"

"Hard stuff?" repeated the boy wonderingly.

"Yes, potheen. Come now, doesn't he have a drink of good potheen on board at times?"

"No," said the boy. "I never saw none. He has whuskey, though."

O'Neill chuckled. "That's the same thing as potheen, ye young haythen. It's yer education that's been sadly neglected, not to understand dacent English when yez hear it."

"Duncan Carmichael never teaches me anything," returned the boy, "'cept about working the cutter"

"An' what can yez do wid her?"

"Handle her by myself most weathers, and has to. Duncan Carmichael turns in and leaves me to it. He licks me when I rouse him up on deck; so I mostly let him lie, and carries on as far as the canvas'll stand. When it comes down hard I has to call him and take the lickin', 'cause, yo see, I ain't strong enough yet to snug her down by myself."

"Duncan Carmichael is a brute," said Sneyd. "I should like to treat him to a thundering good hiding."

"You'd best not let him come nigh you, sir," said the boy.

"Why ever not? Do you think he would be too strong for me?"

The boy avoided a direct answer. "You and Mr. O'Neill here are what they call Jacobites, ain't you, sir?"

"Well," said Sneyd, laughing, "it's rather a dangerous thing to admit just now; but I may say that we are, distinctly."

"Then," rejoined the boy, "I'd keep out of Duncan Carmichael's way if I was you. I don't know what Jacobite means, but I heard him say to a drover we had aboard yesterday, that if he could catch one he'd 'liver him up to them as wants him—meanin' the soldiers. He said there was a bonnet-fu' o' siller for every Jacobite as was handed over to 'em, and so he should consider it his duty as a Christian to grab as many as he was able."

"Sandy," said Sneyd, "you've taken a great weight off my mind. I had many scruples about running off with this boat. But after what you have told me, those scruples vanish. Duncan Carmichael is an enemy to my cause, and it gives me much pleasure to carry off his boat and turn it to my own uses."

"Then, sir," said the boy solemnly, "you'll carry me off as well, won't you? I'm his as well as the boat, and though I'm not so valuable, still I'm worth something, or he would have tripped me overboard on a dark night long since."

Sneyd looked at him curiously. The old, set face was without expression of any sort or description. The grey eye met his unflinchingly. Years of ill-treatment had not broke the lad's spirit; but they had taught him to repress his feelings.

"Sandy," he said kindly, "perhaps you mistake Duncan Carmichael's intentions. His manner is rough, but very likely he means well towards you. He wouldn't have kept you all these years else. As for coming with O'Neill and myself, I couldn't advise you to do it. We are men of desperate fortunes; outlaws with prices on our heads; and if you were caught in our company you would get into trouble too. The kindest thing we can do for you is to put you ashore somewhere hereabouts. You can walk to the nearest village, and hunt for a job. Believe me, if I could do better for you I'd do it."

The boy's face still wore its impassive look.

"Mr. O'Neill said, sir, you was here lookin' for a ship."

"And suppose we are?" replied Sneyd.

"The Prince's ship, sir?"

"Well?"

"Well, you won't find her, sir, that's all. We met her in Jura Sound three months back, heading to the s'uthard."

Sneyd and O'Neill exchanged a glance of disappointment.

"And then, sir," continued the boy, "Mr. O'Neill said that, if she didn't turn up, you'd head down to the Irish coast."

"Yez seem to have the ears of an ass, young man," said O'Neill.

A faint smile flickered across the boy's face. "An' neither of you knowed the way, sir."

"Well," said Sneyd, "what are you driving at?"

"Just this, sir, that you'll never find it alone. There's nothing on board to show it you but me. No chart, no compass, no anything. I've been down to Cawmelt'n wellnigh a score and a half o' times, and know every inch of the way—how the tides set at Easdale and the other places, and all the rest of it. Duncan Carmichael strapped it into me."

"What do you think, O'Neill?"

"I think we should take the pilot that's offered, yer honour, chance we don't get another."

"Very well, then," said Sneyd, "be it so. And now, then, to consider further. Supposing we get down to the Irish coast without mishap, what are we to do when we reach it? Nothing that I can see. In Ireland we should probably be in almost as much danger as we were in Lochaber. The Irish were in strong force with the Prince's army. My own colonel was an Irishman. The Elector's troops are sure to be in force there, and if we landed they would be wellnigh certain to have us by the heels before many days were past.

"Now what I've been thinking of is this: Could we contrive to navigate this little boat into a French port?"

O'Neill whistled long and low. "It's a large order, yer honour. For one thing, we're not rightly fitted for a cruise of that length. For another, the wee boat is full small for it. Ye see, we've neither instruments nor victual. Fishing may be all very well in these narrow waters, but it would be a slender reed to depend on in the open sea."

"We must land somewhere," said Sneyd, "and lift some sheep, and cure the meat either by salting or smoking it. Then we must overhaul some craft or other, and take from her, either by force or persuasion, barrels for our water, and a compass, and whatever else you want. And then, if you others are willing, we'll risk it."

"I'm yer man, sor," exclaimed O'Neill. "Sandy, lad, where's the convanientest place to stale sheep?"

"Charsaig Bay, in the Mull. Take 'em across and salt 'em down in Lowlan'man's Bay, in Jura. Snug anchorage there, and no one to interfere. Boil down salt in the kettle."

"Ye young villain, yez have been at this game before."

"Duncan Carmichael lifts a sheep or two occasionally, and sells the meat further up the coast," replied the lad unconcernedly.

"Well," said Sneyd, "our morality is dubious, although the laws of warfare more or less defend it; but that is downright thieving. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Duncan Carmichael was my master," said the lad, evidently considering that this was a sufficient reason for his action, and that no excuse was needed.

Sneyd and O'Neill exchanged a glance of pity, and the conversation ended.

(To be continued.)

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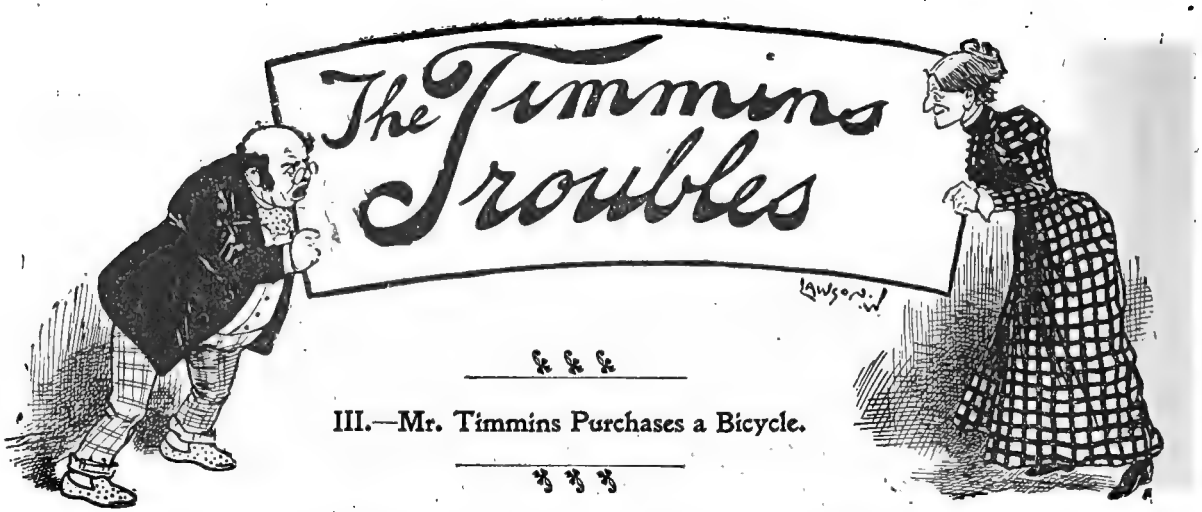

III.—Mr. Timmins Purchases a Bicycle.

"Now, my dear," said Mr. Timmins, hurrying up to his wife's room, "if you'll come down in the yard I've got a pleasant surprise for you."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Timmins; "what have you got—a horse?"

"Guess again," grinned Mr. Timmins, "it's something like a horse."

"I know. It's a new parlour carpet. That's what it is."

"No, it isn't either. I said it's something like a horse; that is, it goes when you make it. Guess again."

"Is it paint for the kitchen walls?" asked Mrs. Timmins innocently.

"No, and it isn't a hogshead of stove blacking, nor a set of dining-room furniture, nor seven gross of wash-tubs. Now guess again."

"Then it must be some lace curtains for the sitting-room windows. Isn't that splendid?" and Mrs. Timmins patted her husband on both cheeks and danced up and down with delight.

"It's a bicycle, that's what it is!" growled Mr. Timmins. "I bought it for exercise and I'm going to ride it. Come down and see me."

"Well, I am glad," ejaculated Mrs. Timmins. "You ought to have more exercise, and if there's exercise in anything it's in a bicycle. Do let's see it."

Mr. Timmins conducted his wife to the yard and descanted at length on the merits of the machine, which was an old "ordinary."

"In a few weeks' time I shall be able to go a mile a minute," he said, as he steadied the apparatus against the clothes post and prepared to mount. "Now, you watch me go to the end of this path."

He got a foot into one treadle and went head first into a flower-bed with a prodigious crash.

"Hadn't you better tie it up to the post until you get on?" suggested Mrs. Timmins.

"Leave me alone, will ye?" demanded Mr. Timmins, struggling to an even keel. "I'm doing most o' this myself. Now you hold on and keep your mouth shut. It takes a little practice, that's all."

Mr. Timmins mounted again and scuttled along four or five feet, and flopped over on the grass plot.

"That's splendid," commented Mrs. Timmins. "You've got the idea already. Let me hold it for you this time."

"If you've got any extra strength you hold your tongue!" growled Mr. Timmins. "It don't want any holding. It isn't alive. Stand back and give me room, now."

The third time Mr. Timmins ambled to the end of the path, and went down all in a heap among the flowerpots.

"That's too lovely for anything!" proclaimed Mrs. Timmins. "You went more than a mile a minute then."

"Come and take it off," roared Mr. Timmins. "Help me up!" and that worthy gentleman struggled and plunged like a whale in shallow water.

Mrs. Timmins assisted in righting him, and brushed him down.

"I know where you made your mistake," said she. "The little wheel ought to go first. Try it that way going back."

"Maybe you can ride this bicycle better than I can!" howled Mr. Timmins. "You know all about wheels! What you want now is a lantern in your mouth and ten minutes behind time to be Big Ben! Don't you see the big wheel has got to go first?"

"Yes, dear," murmured Mrs. Timmins, "but I thought if you practised with the little wheel at first, you wouldn't have so far to fall."

"Who fell?" demanded Mr. Timmins. "Didn't you see me step off? I tripped; that's all. Now you just watch me go back!"

Once more Mr. Timmins started, but the big wheel turned round and looked him in the face, and then began to stagger.

"Look out!" squealed Mrs. Timmins.

Mr. Timmins wrenched away and kicked and struggled, but it was of no avail. Down he came and the bicycle was a hopeless wreck.

"What d'you want to yell for?" he shrieked. "Couldn't you keep your mouth shut? What do you think you are—a foghorn?"

"Never mind, my dear," counselled Mrs. Timmins. "I'm afraid the exercise was too violent, and I'm rather glad you broke it."

"I suppose so," snorted Mr. Timmins. "There's £3 gone."

"Don't worry, love. I'll go without the carpet and curtains, and the paint will do well enough in the kitchen. Let me rub you with arnica."

But Mr. Timmins was too deeply grieved by his wife's conduct to accept any office at her hands, preferring to punish her by letting his wounds smart rather than to get well, and thereby relieve her of any anxiety she brought on herself by acting so outrageously under the circumstances.

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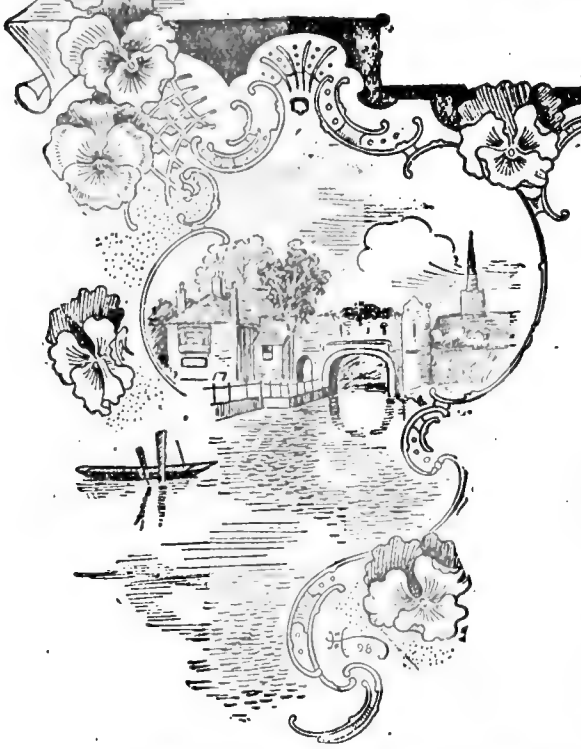
A Strange Assault.



A TALL young man entered my dental rooms one December afternoon, and on being informed that I was busy, began to pace up and down the waiting-room.

I caught a glimpse of him now and then, and his restlessness so annoyed me that, when I was at liberty, I inquired what I could do for him rather impatiently.

He did not seem to notice my brusqueness, and asked abruptly:

"Do you fill teeth?"

"Certainly."

"Will you fill mine?"

"Of course; take a seat in the chair."

As the young man leant back and opened his mouth, I perceived that he was extremely nervous. His lips twitched, and his lower jaw shifted uneasily while I made my examination.

At length I said:

"Your teeth are in good condition with two exceptions—the lower molars are badly decayed, and need immediate attention."

"Yes," said he, "I am aware of that fact."

I prepared my instruments, and was about to begin operating, but was interrupted by my patient asking, in a low tone:

"Can you keep a secret, sir?"

"Yes," I replied, "my patients often entrust me with such things."

"Well," he continued seriously, ignoring my levity, "never mention to anybody that I have been here till the time comes."

"All right."

"Remember, till the time comes," he repeated earnestly.

By this time I had become convinced that my visitor was decidedly lacking in his mental qualities; he seemed to read my thoughts and said quickly:

"No, I am perfectly sane; and, furthermore, I haven't had a drop of liquor for over a week. You look like a man who can be trusted, and if you will do this work for me without asking questions, and consent to take a merely nominal fee, one year from now you will be handsomely repaid. Will you fill both those teeth, one of them with a diamond, for five shillings?"

I burst out laughing.

"My dear sir," I said, "you seem like a respectable man, but I wish you would cease talking in enigmas, and come to the point. In the first place, the price you offer is ridiculously low; and, besides, I don't happen to keep diamonds in stock as filling materials."

"Doubtless not, but here is one which will serve the purpose."

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a diamond which sparkled with much brilliancy.

"There is the gem," he said. "It is worth £20,000 to me."

I said nothing, but smiled inwardly; for the stone, although apparently a fine one, did not seem to me to be worth more than £50. My patient continued:

"Will it fit into one of those cavities and leave room for enough filling material to effectually conceal it, and prevent anyone but a dentist getting at it?"

"Yes," I replied, "the diamond is small, and the cavity in the left molar is quite large enough to hold it."

"The left one?"

"Yes."

"Well, go on, and get the job over as soon as possible."

I am not a believer in hypnotism, but some power that I could not explain made me do as the young man wished. I excavated the cavities and sealed up the diamond. In each instance the nerve had previously been killed. Neither of us spoke until the operation was completed. Then my patient said:

"Well, sir, I am exceedingly obliged to you. One year from to-day I will return, explain everything, and

pay you twenty pounds in gold, providing that you will make affidavit as to what you have done."

"Very good," I said smiling as I bowed him out.

Naturally, I felt much curiosity regarding my strange customer. I thought at first that he might be a thief who had stolen the diamond. But such an idea was absurd. He looked honest enough, and then why should he come to me—a total stranger—if such were the case?

"Will!" I called.

"Yes, sir," responded my boy, with startling quickness. "What is it, sir?"

"Follow that man," I said, pointing to my mysterious caller, who had just reached the corner, "and let me know where he goes."

"Right," replied Will, seizing his cap, and he was off at a faster rate than I had ever known him to adopt.

He returned in about an hour, and said with a rueful countenance:

"I tried werry hard, sir, but he gave me the slip down Regent Street."

"How's that? You lost sight of him, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're a fine detective, and you took a long time to accomplish nothing," I said, with as fierce a look as I could command.

The spell which the young man seemed to have cast over me lasted for several hours. I was at work in a half-hearted way when a thought struck me like a blow.

I remembered that in my abstraction I had placed the diamond in the tooth on the right side instead of the left as I had at first intended. Both cavities had proved larger than I had at first anticipated. Of course, it did not really matter, but I had neglected to tell my patient about the change. He had gone away with the idea that his left side molar contained his much-valued diamond.

"Oh, well," I reflected philosophically, "what difference does it make? If he comes back I can extract the diamond, and if he goes somewhere else, it will serve him right for telling me a falsehood. Still, I doubt if I shall ever see man, tooth, or diamond again. I am several shillings out of pocket just because I was foolish enough to humour the whim of an eccentric individual."

About six months afterwards, Joe, the successor to Will, in the important position of general errand boy, announced that a "werry pretty lady" wanted to see me. I might as well explain here that the precocious Will had basely deserted me some time before, taking with him as souvenirs five pounds odd in money, some sheets of gold, and a few other articles belonging to my equipment.

My visitor had a worried look on her beautiful face.

"Are you Mr. Wilson?" she asked.

"I am."

"Do you know Mr. Albert Dawson?"

"I have no recollection of ever meeting a gentleman of that name."

"That is strange," she continued earnestly. "He seems to know you very well, and I have come to ask you to visit him."

"Why?"

"He has been terribly injured. Perhaps you read in this morning's paper of the singular assault on the Thames Embankment last night."

"No," I said; "I have not had time to look at the newspaper."

"Well," replied the young lady, "Mr. Dawson and I were returning from the theatre, and had reached a rather deserted spot, when suddenly two men sprang upon us, and while one held him, the other forced open his mouth and lacerated his tongue and cheek in a most terrible manner."

"Did they not attack you?"

"No, they did not," she replied, "and it seems very strange, because I had my purse in my hand at the time, and Mr. Dawson says he only had a few shillings in his pocket."

"Did they take anything from him?" I asked. I was much interested in my visitor's story, but still more in herself, for she had a most charming manner.

"Well, yes, but it seems almost too funny to mention it. Their only weapon, it appears, was a pair of dental forceps, and with these, in a most bungling manner, they managed to pull out one of Mr. Dawson's teeth. Then they made off at once. The whole affair took place in a few seconds."

A ray of light dawned on me.

"Is Mr. Dawson a tall man?" I asked.

"He is."

"Has he fair hair and large teeth?"

"Yes."

"All right; I will go with you. I think I remember him, although I did not recognise his name."

I was ushered into a well-furnished room, and at once recognised my mysterious client. He was sitting in an armchair, and his face was well covered with bandages. He was apparently in much pain, but smiled faintly as he recognised me. A servant who was in the apartment at my entrance withdrew, and as soon as the door was closed Mr. Dawson spoke: "Well, Mr. Wilson," he said faintly, "I'm in a pretty bad shape."

"I see you are," I returned; "but I hope it is not very serious."

"Oh, no," he said dolefully; "but it isn't the physical pain I mind so much. It's the loss of the diamond."

"Yes," I said, for the want of something better. I thought it best to allow him to talk, although it was with difficulty that he continued the conversation.

"I suppose you have wondered greatly why I had you to perform such a singular operation, and as everything is lost I think it best to explain the matter. My father is an exceedingly rich man, and I am his only son. Unfortunately, I fell into bad habits and became a victim of drink. My father did everything to stop my downward career, and finally reduced my allowance to next to nothing. So low, however, had I fallen, that I commenced to pawn everything I could lay hands on.

"Not to weary you, I hasten to tell you that this deplorable state of affairs continued until my twentieth birthday. On that occasion my father had a serious talk with me, and I was informed that by the will of my grandfather I had been left £20,000, to be given me at my majority. There was one condition attached to the bequest. My father handed me a small diamond, and stated that the jewel was to be kept on my person for one year. Should it pass out of my possession, the bequest was to be given to a charitable institution. As my father handed me the diamond he remarked sorrowfully that he had little hope of my keeping it.

"My emotions may be imagined. Even as I took the jewel I felt the horrible desire for drink come over me. My manhood, however, asserted itself. I walked out into the air with a terrible conflict raging within me. If I pawned the diamond, I would have enough money for a month or two, but how should I ever be able to redeem it? My father, as I have intimated, gave me little or nothing, my friends all fought shy of me, and I was incapable of work. In the midst of my reverie I passed your place, and a thought seized me. I entered, and you know the rest of the story."

I listened to Mr. Dawson's recital as he spoke with increasing difficulty, and rejoiced that I could so soon relieve his mind. Everything was clear to me. My errand-boy had evidently overheard my conversation with my mysterious patient. He had listened to our talk about a £20,000 diamond, and the tooth into which I intended to place it, and had informed some unscrupulous friend. The conspiracy had no doubt been formed carefully, and Mr. Dawson's movements were probably closely watched for a favourable opportunity to perform the robbery. The auspicious occasion had arrived on the previous night, and they had waylaid him and—extracted the wrong tooth.

I felt glad that my mistake had served Mr. Dawson such a good turn. Had I sealed up the diamond in the left molar, as I had informed him, my boy's rascally scheme would have succeeded. To make sure that my hopes were not based on false reasoning, I asked Mr. Dawson:

"Of course, it was the tooth on the left side of the jaw that the robbers extracted?"

"Yes," he replied sorrowfully, "it was. I suppose Miss Spring has told you all about the attack?"

"She has," I replied. My spirits fell when he told me the name of his fair friend. I had hoped she would have proved to be his sister.

"She is a girl in a thousand!" exclaimed my patient, with as much enthusiasm as his condition permitted. "Why, do you know, since I met her a month or so back, the desire for drink has completely left me. I feel sure that I could carry the diamond about me now with perfect safety; but alas, it is gone! I would not have my father know of this for all the world. I am at Miss Spring's residence, and her people insist that I shall not be moved for a day or two. Can you think of any way by which the diamond could be recovered without publicity? If we call in a detective, I fear that the story will leak out somehow. You befriended me once, that's why I have asked you to come now. Can you help me?"

"Entrust the matter to me," I said reassuringly. For some reason or other I felt inclined to prolong the conversation, probably that the joy of Mr. Dawson might be all the greater when I told him of the lucky error which had preserved the diamond.

"Do you think there is any chance of discovering the men?" he asked. Something in my manner seemed to give him hope.

"No," I replied, "not the least."

"Then what do you mean?" he returned, with much disappointment.

"Why, my dear sir, I mean just this. You have been labouring under a false impression, and fortunately the thieves have shared it with you. I was asked to place the diamond in the tooth on the left side. By mistake I put it in the right molar, and there it is at this very moment. All the robbers have for their trouble, is a large-sized tooth filled with amalgam in a very superior style, if I do say so myself."

As I made this revelation I laughed heartily and glanced at Mr. Dawson, expecting to enjoy the look of relief that would doubtless spread over such parts of his countenance as were visible.

To my great surprise he fell back with a groan of despair.

"You say that you put the diamond in the tooth on the right side?"

"Yes."

"Why, I had that tooth extracted three months ago when I was in Birmingham."

It was my turn now to get excited.

"You did?" was all I could say.

"Yes. I was there on a trip, and I met with a slight accident and loosened that tooth, so I had it out."

"What was the name of the dentist?"

"I have completely forgotten, but I remember the street and number."

"What was it?"

Mr. Dawson gave me the address and I took the next train for Birmingham. All my efforts were in vain, however. The dentist who extracted the tooth made a habit of throwing away such results of his skill. The dental organ with its £20,000 secret was doubtless submerged in some ash-heap.

There it may be to this day. Mr. Dawson's expected legacy went to the "Home for the Relief of Crippled Orphans," and a dozen other worthy objects.

Mr. Dawson, however, married Miss Spring, and by the last account was living very happily, having by his good conduct regained the favour of his father.

M. E. McDERMOT.

TWENTY £25 NOTES OFFERED.

THIS MAGNIFICENT OFFER is made by the Editor of *Pearson's Weekly* for one week only. Particulars of it will be found in the Christmas Double Number, published on Thursday, December 22nd.

It is necessary to comply with the conditions; you should, therefore, not fail to secure a copy of the paper at once.

In addition to this, the Christmas Double Number of *P. W.* contains the opening chapters of a new serial story, entitled "Cold Steel," by Mr. M. P. Shiel, an instalment of a splendid story entitled "Bunderby's Boys and I," by Arnold Golsworthy, profusely illustrated by Tom Browne, half-a-dozen complete short stories, well illustrated, besides numerous articles, and prizes of £1,000, £100, and £25 in a football competition.

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The - Final - War.

BY LOUIS TRACY.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The Battle of Kharkof.

It was in Russia that events marched with dramatic sequence.

Whilst the struggle for possession of Petrovsk on the Caspian was taking place, telegraphic instructions reached the Grand Duke Paul to the effect that he was to cross the Caucasus with as many men as possible, and fall upon the British flank or rear. He explained that no effective force could possibly reach Vladikavkaz from Tiflis, by the post road over the mountains, under a fortnight, as his stores and the greater number of his troops were concentrated at Baku.

Discussion on the point was cut short by the seizure of the telegraph line by the British, but Duke Paul loyally strove to obey the directions received from St. Petersburg.

His disheartened and weary men only gained the Kazbek Pass to find it impregnably fortified against them by a strong brigade detached from the Madras army for this particular duty. In vain they strove to pierce the barrier of rock and Maxim guns. The fighting was fierce and unceasing, and as it transpired, the last lives spent in the campaign were given in this magnificent but gloomy gorge.

With the base thus secured, and an excellent railway at his disposal, Sir George White had only ordinary difficulties to surmount in joining his forces with those of Lord Methuen at Rostof and Taganrog.

The exact plan of campaign now began to unfold itself, but to note its salient details the reader should consult a modern map of European Russia.

The military strength of this great country was centered in three distinct localities, at Moscow, along the line of the river Dniester, including the Crimea, and south of the Caucasian range. Of course St. Petersburg, Poland, and the Austrian frontier were also held by great army corps, but there were many good and convincing reasons, which will presently appear, why the two former localities should not be denuded of troops, and on Austria a very watchful eye must be kept, for the successes achieved by England and the United States were quickening her pulses and stirring her ambitions.

The fighting was fierce and unceasing.

Away in the far east of Siberia, Canadian and American forces were encamped at Vladivostock and Nikolaievsk, whilst it was felt that the Baltic must soon be the scene of far-reaching events when the British and American fleets opened fire upon the defences of the Neva.

Sir George White, who now took supreme command of the combined armies in Southern Russia, knew, therefore, that the principal portion of the problem before him was to meet the enemy under those conditions most likely to achieve success in the first great battle.

The army of the Caucacus was practically non-existent. Sir Charles Warren's army corps, securely posted at Kremenchug on the Dneiper, held secure the chief river and rail routes from western and north-western Russia, and the Commander-in-Chief was left to deal with the divisions hastily placed on a war footing at Moscow, Orel, Tambof, Kursk, and Kharkof.

In all, he expected to meet 400,000 men, and to oppose them he had 280,000. The *personnel* of his troops, however, atoned for the relative paucity of their numbers. The severe hardships of the advance from India had weeded out the weak and sickly ones, and the contingent led by Lord Methuen was fully up to the standard of the superb army which had crossed the Caspian.

Officers and men were filled with quiet enthusiasm, whilst the daily receipt of encouraging news from the other centres of operations in France and Germany filled them with a keen desire to cross swords with the enemy under the strenuous conditions imposed upon their comrades elsewhere.

The Russians, taught by the experiences of their allies, did not seek to hurl themselves in small sections upon the invaders.

So precarious was the political condition of the country, and so excited was public feeling by the trend of events, that the Tsar and his advisers fully realised the imperative necessity there was for a crushing victory over the English at the first available opportunity.

Absolutely unprepared as they were for an attack in the vital quarter in which it had developed, they found the delays and anxieties of effective mobilisation almost as trying as Sir George White's progress through a barren country, filled with a sullen if not actively hostile population.

It soon became evident that the crucial struggle of the campaign would take place in the neighbourhood of Kharkof, a large town on the river of that name, and its tributary, the Lopani. Kharkof may be regarded as the commercial capital of Southern Russia.

The leading divisions of both armies had already met in the locality, but the commanders had received strict injunctions to avoid a serious encounter. Concentration and analysis of strength were the objects aimed at, alike by Sir George White, and his redoubtable opponent, General Kouropatkin.

Each wished to take the measure of the other before throwing the die which was to determine the tremendous stake at issue between them. Each felt intuitively that the future history of the campaign would be greatly influenced by the result of the impending battle, but neither of them knew the scope of the drama being played at that moment in Russia—a playing with empires in which they were but notable actors.

At last, towards the close of a sweltering August day, when the air was still tremulous with heat, and even the natives in the Indian Army growled about the supply of ice falling off owing to the difficulty of transporting the machinery, Sir George White found himself within striking distance of Kharkof.

From the heights through which ran the river Lopani, he could plainly see the tents of the Russian host, and the

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Intelligence Department soon provided him with reports that showed the disposition and numerical superiority of the enemy.

The British army was composed of eight divisions of 30,000 men in each, and these again were split up into five brigades. The first division, commanded by Lieutenant-General George Nicholas Channer, V.C., had been in position near Kharkof for some days, and had succeeded in blowing up a tunnel which carried the line from Kharkof to Taganrog through a precipitous and otherwise inaccessible mountain barrier which protected the British left from attack.

Sir George White . . . . earnestly examined the Russians.

The first and second divisions were stationed in the comparatively narrow valley through which the Kharkof river flows, somewhat in front of the confluence of that shallow stream with a small rivulet. The remainder of the army, with the guns and cavalry, were grouped on the more open ground which forms the watershed of the river Lopani, and there could be little doubt that in this confined space—for the front of the entire army did not spread over four miles—would be fought one of the most stubborn battles of modern days.

Sir George White, surrounded by his staff, passed the brief hours of declining light in earnestly examining the Russians.

To his trained eye it was quite evident that they were yet in a state of unpreparedness, and he said in a relieved tone whilst discussing the matter:

"I am glad that the attack will probably be delayed. It will give me time to think and the men time to rest."

He summoned a Council of War for ten o'clock, and, after an early meal, retired to his quarters, demanding complete seclusion until the hour approached for the assembly of the chiefs of divisions.

When this brilliant collection of distinguished soldiers had gathered round the Commander-in-Chief, it was seen that there were present Lord Methuen, as second in command, Major-Generals Sir G. B. Wolseley, Sir A. P. Grant, Alexander A. A. Kinloch, G. N. Channer, V.C., Sir Robert Low, Sir R. C. Stewart, W. Galbraith and W. F. Gatacre. Major-General H. F. Grant commanded the cavalry as a whole, and Major-General H. C. Lewes, the artillery.

Sir George White quickly placed them in possession of his views.

"I feel convinced," he said, "that our best plan of action is to await attack by the enemy. We are outnumbered by nearly two to one, and the broken nature of the country renders rapid co-operation of guns and cavalry with our infantry attack almost impossible. This fact also tells in our favour in minimising the superiority of the enemy in those arms.

"They, of course, like ourselves, have heard details of the principal battles in France, and know quite well that Lord Roberts has invariably commenced his operations in the dark or just before dawn. Kouropatkin will expect us to follow the same rule, and will await attack during the whole of this night.

"I have arranged that his rest shall be sufficiently disturbed by strong patrols along the front. To-morrow his men will be tired after the night's vigil, and he will probably endeavour to bring his strong artillery arm into effective use. It will be for you, Lewes, to see that he is kept fully occupied in this matter."

Major-General Lewes nodded affably.

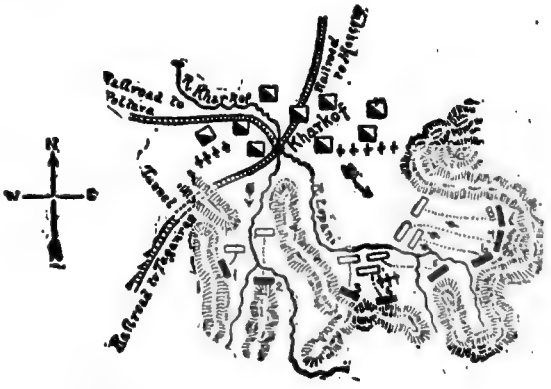
"If we still make no move I feel assured," continued the Commander-in-Chief, "that Kouropatkin will himself attack under cover of the night. His officers, of course, know the ground well, and it is conceivable that they may imagine we feel ourselves incapable of meeting them upon equal terms."

A quaint smile flitted round the Council at this instance of frail reasoning on the part of the enemy.

"We must see to it that our men are thoroughly rested and well fed during the day. As soon as the dusk cloaks our movements, each division will retire upon a special position assigned to it and marked here upon a sketch map of the two valleys prepared by the Intelligence Department. During to-night a comprehensive scheme will be prepared by that department, and handed to all brigadiers and commanding officers of regiments, so that there should be no confusion, or undue haste, or unnecessary delay.

"The object of this change of position will, no doubt, gentlemen, be quite clear to you. If Kouropatkin groups his dense columns with the intention of striking heavy blows at us in a definite locality, he will be completely nonplussed if there is nothing to hit at when he gets there."

And now Sir George White spoke very slowly and impressively. "It may be regarded as certain," he said, "that the advance will nevertheless be maintained, but with irresolution and anxiety in place of the confidence of the opening movement. If this be so, we can count upon accomplishing the first effective development ourselves; on the other hand, if Kouropatkin retires, we will follow up and give battle at dawn on the outskirts of Kharkof." The Commander-in-Chief paused, and a buzz of conversation at once rose, whilst the officers gathered round the large scale sketch-map, a small reproduction of which is given here.



PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF KHARKOF.

THE ARROWS SHOW THE LINES OF THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE.

A Russian division of 40,000 infantry with 3,000 cavalry and 100 guns. Nine divisions in all, but only 400 guns were used in the preliminary action.

Represent British and Russian guns.

An English division of 30,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry. Eight divisions in all, with 340 guns. Each division is numbered, and the position shown is that occupied during the day.

The same division at night, the dotted lines marking the line of march.

The Battery of Maxims stood in a semi-circle on the high ground behind division No. 5. Scale 2 miles to 1 inch.

Major-General Kinloch, who is perhaps the tallest man in the British army, and notable throughout India as a sports-

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man who never shoots a bear, but stabs him with a short hogspear, commanded the 5th Division, and forthwith expressed his satisfaction with the arrangements.

"If everything comes off as you predict, and I fully agree with your forecast, I ought to get a good share of the ultimate attack," he said to Sir George White, pointing to the position occupied by his corps on the map.

"Yes," said the Chief with a smile. "I thought you would notice that fact. Indeed, I intend to remain with you myself during the night, and I have caused the field telegraph to be centred there."

If General Kouropatkin had subjected his brain to a species of "X" rays, warranted to reveal the thoughts, his ideas could not have been more exactly made known to the British leader.

Kouropatkin . . . hurried forward to ascertain what was the matter.

To tell the truth, he scoffed most loudly at the pusillanimity of the English in not venturing to attack him, and he was bitterly annoyed at the manner in which his artillery was held in check, and even badly knocked about by the magnificent service of the British gunners.

All through the baking heat of the day he eagerly watched for developments, but none came, and as night fell he gave orders for arrangements to be made for a general advance, timed to be effective about midnight.

Two divisions were to carry the British left in the Kharkof Valley, and then cross the low hills which intervened between this river and its neighbour, the Lopani. A third division would follow in support, chiefly to aid in the flanking movement directed against the British centre and main body, which would be assaulted in front by three divisions, two others acting as supports. The remaining division would hold Kharkof, being deemed superfluous for the task in hand.

At 11.30 p.m. the advance guard of the leading Muscovite divisions came in touch with the British vedettes.

These latter steadily retired, and, a few minutes later, the Russian officers halted their men to form them up for the final rush upon the British lines. The final rush was duly delivered, and spent itself upon thin air, to the intense amazement of the brigadiers.

Astounded to hear little or no firing, Kouropatkin, who was with the first body of supports in the centre attack along the Lopani flats, hurried forward to ascertain what was the matter.

He quickly decided that the British were in full retreat before him, and gave imperative orders that the advance was to proceed with the utmost celerity.

At twelve o'clock some desultory firing in front stirred the leading battalions to again stumble on at top speed in the darkness, but they met with equal disappointment.

By this time confusion, irregularity, uncertainty of formation, and loss of discipline, began to take serious effect upon the Russians. But they poured blindly on in disorganised hordes, and instead of turning to the south-east along the broad reaches of the valley, they streamed across the Lopani river, and blundered right on top of Kinloch's division before they knew that an enemy was in the locality.

A short and sharp bayonet charge by the 2nd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, enlightened them considerably, and two brigades, more frightened than hurt, staggered back across the shallow, boulder-strewn river. Kouropatkin now sent off nearly every member of his staff to order a general halt, and to hurry up the rocket apparatus.

This took some time in fulfilment, but the British troops never moved, nor did they show the slightest sign of their presence elsewhere than in the precise spot where they had been discovered.

Sir George White stuck rigidly to his theory. He knew that under existing conditions the Russian supports and reserves must be fast crowding on the fighting line, thus seriously discounting their tactical value. No other battle in which such large numbers of men were engaged had been confined to so small an area, and it was precisely this consideration that he aimed at.

Shortly before one o'clock a rocket hissed into the sky, and bursting over the slopes occupied by the 5th Division, revealed fully the nature of their position. Other rockets followed, and Kouropatkin found out the location of the whole British centre and right.

Whilst he was hurriedly striving to organise an attack in force along the entire front, the Russians underwent the most terrible experience that any army was ever subjected to. Not even the Plevna redoubt was the scene of such carnage as was effected during the next half-hour.

On the hill behind Kinloch's corps sixty Maxims and seven batteries of artillery had been arranged in a crescent, so as to command the whole plateau inclosed by the angle of the Lopani.

The guns fired shrapnel by guess-work, and destructive enough they were, but with the Maxims, by means of their sighting appliances, the element of human miscalculation was entirely eliminated.

These valuable weapons can be trained, during daylight, to sweep a definite area of ground both in length and depth, and fixed by means of indicators which prevent them from ranging beyond the predetermined limits. They fire 200 bullets per minute when in full swing.

Upon the Russian troops, crowded together in dense masses, a pitiless storm of lead, averaging nearly 12,000 bullets per minute, rained ceaselessly from the heights, whilst the artillery added terror to the more silent havoc thus caused in the darkness by sending salvoes of shrapnel shrieking and tearing through the ranks.

Every few seconds a rocket flew over the Russian host, shedding a fitful and supernatural light over the scene, and seeming, by its mere radiance, to render the holocaust of death more awful and more widespread.

Kouropatkin knew that the sole hope of extricating his army from its disastrous predicament lay in a successful general attack upon the British position.

With the desperate courage of despair, he devoted himself to this object, and at last managed to secure a combined advance on the six English divisions.

It was at this stage of the battle that a chance Russian bullet smashed the telegraph instrument communicating with the 1st and 2nd Divisions on the left wing, and for nearly an hour no communication could be held with Channer or Gatacre who commanded there.

He reached Sir A. P. Grant in time.

That stray ounce of lead gave Lieutenant Rodney his V. C.

The Russian advance along the Kharkof Valley, narrower and less practicable than the watershed of the Lopani, was considerably delayed by the natural difficulties of the ground.

Failing to find the British where he expected them, and hearing sounds of a heavy engagement on the other side of the hill, the Russian commander thought that the whole British force was to be found there, and at once changed

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his direction in order to cross the hill and delivered a flank attack on the British in aid of Kouropatkin.

Some time elapsed before Channer discovered this serious development, and although he was able to communicate it to Gatacre, they were quite powerless to inform the Commander-in-chief.

Both generals forthwith resolved to depart from their instructions and attack the Russians, but valuable time had been lost, and, if possible, Sir George White should learn what was going on.

It was impracticable to reach the British lines from the rear owing to the ravines and precipitous gorges that separated the two forces on that side, and the only way was over the hill now being crossed by the Russians and along the left bank of the Lopani, through the Russian fighting line, until the third division was reached.

Major-General Channer called for volunteers to take the message, and Rodney and five other officers were selected to make the attempt individually.

Rodney was the only one of the six who got through. He had lost his helmet, his tunic was slashed with sabre cuts, his left riding-boot was torn with a lance, and his horse bleeding from several wounds, but he reached Sir A. P. Grant in time for the latter to swing half his division round to meet the new attack.

Half dead with fatigue—for he had been working hard all day, and this daring ride was no small addition to his labour—he managed to mount a fresh horse, and proceeded in comparative safety to headquarters, where he was warmly thanked by Sir George White for his splendid achievement.

Dawn was now breaking over the field, and the end was near.

The only bit of solid fighting done by the Russians was on the right, where they certainly gave the divisions led by Sir A. P. Grant, Channer, and Gatacre, some trouble to beat them.

For the rest, a general advance of the British line converted a feeble resistance into a wild rout. The cavalry and guns took up the pursuit, and the remnants of Kouropatkin's force fled to the town of Kharkof, or were dissipated over the steppes to the north.

Leaving nothing to chance, for a fresh and powerful division, with the whole of the Russian guns and cavalry, still held the town, the Commander-in-Chief lost no time in preparing to carry the place by assault.

A fresh battle appeared to be imminent, and the artillery were already taking up position to begin shelling the fort at the confluence of the rivers, when a Russian officer, carrying a flag of truce, was seen riding at top speed towards the British lines.

"It is a ruse to delay us," said a member of the Commander-in-Chief's staff.

"If it be," said Sir George, "it will not avail them long. Meanwhile sound the 'Cease fire.'"

The envoy was speedily brought to the Chief.

"I am sent by General Kouropatkin," he said in English, "to arrange terms of capitulation."

"Any terms must be unconditional," was the brief response.

"General Kouropatkin thought that you would give no other reply," said the officer sadly. "In explanation of his action and desires, he sends you this translation of a telegram he has just received from Moscow."

Sir George White read the paper handed to him.

He started with genuine amazement when he had mastered its contents, the full purport of which he seemed at first unable to realise.

After a long pause, during which the staff marvelled at the deep concern and bewilderment of the Chief's expression, he said to the envoy:

"Convey to General Kouropatkin the assurances of my keen sympathy, and say that I will meet him immediately to discuss the situation."

The officer saluted, and rode off.

Then Sir George White read the telegram aloud to his staff, adding the memorable words:

"So far as Russia is concerned, gentlemen, the war is over."

CHAPTER XLV.

The End of the Romanoffs.

"Has he come yet?"

"No, Petrof, have a little patience. The Little Father won't keep you long."

"Ah! No! Not long! Not long—now! But it has been weary waiting."

"By the Prophet, we are impatient this morning. Here, come a little more to the front. You won't be so crushed. And why so anxious?"

"Don't you know? Are your eyes closed; are your ears heavy? It is a bitter day for our Little Father. Yes. The Romanoffs are nearly run to earth. A few hours longer—a few hours!"

The officer saluted.

"Hey? What do you mean, Petrof?"

"Silence, there!"

And with this gruff command there fell on the shoulders of the lusty moujik who asked the question a blow from the shaft of a lance. A mounted soldier passing along vainly seeking to maintain order, had overheard them. The little group scowled as he rode on and looked at each other with meaning glances.

The streets of Moscow were crowded with eager throngs. The Tsar was about to enter in. Everyone knew that: the word had been passed round mysteriously in the morning. He had suddenly left St. Petersburg, alarmed at the news of growing calamity, and had hastened down to the old capital to meet his brother, and throw himself into the centre of operations. The whole city was in a ferment of excitement.

For news of late had been amazing, stupendous. Scarcely had the terrible announcement come that the English had beaten the Asian army and had forced its way to Russian soil, than another and still more miraculous event convulsed the whole nation.

Seven days after the remarkable meeting at the Grand Duke Paul's house, the storm that had been so slowly gathering within the Russian dominions gained head, and burst with impetuous fury upon the crown. The Nihilists had risen, not in isolated localities, not with the ineffectual despair of scanty numbers, but simultaneously, multitudinously, in a single moment, and in every quarter.

The first tidings that came to St. Petersburg were sufficiently embarrassing. They announced the revolt of the southern provinces. With ready firmness and dispatch that danger, at least, might be effectually crushed; but scarcely had General Gourko time to make his first hasty arrangements, than fresh intelligence of disaster, growing worse and worse every moment, rained in upon him from all points. It staggered and confused him, for he found that he had at last to contend, not with a conspiracy, but with a nation.

Count Lucovitch had planned his operations well. Whilst the whole available Russian army was hastening to meet the British at Kharkof, and was already engaged, beyond its capacity, with the invincible army of India, a countless host of eager and reckless rebels, resolved to stake everything upon the one decisive blow for their country's freedom, sprang from concealment and hastened in

As he rode slowly through the crowded streets, it was ominous to notice that there was no clamour of welcome.

impetuous march—made more triumphant at every step from the easy victories obtained, and the constant reinforcements gathered from the districts through which they passed—to the three chief cities of the empire.

There was little or no resistance; indeed, none was possible. The path of the insurgents was scarcely defended. They were met by blessings rather than by musket-shots, and with incredible rapidity made their way to the seats of Imperial government. It was then that the Tsar, desperate, yet fearless, resolved to throw himself into Moscow, his ancient and sacred capital, the strongest of all his citadels. There, too, summoned hastily together, were gathered the heads of the Romanoff family and one or two of his trusted generals.

At last, about five o'clock, the gleam of arms in the distance betokened the arrival of the Imperial party at the railway station. A sudden hush came over the excited multitude. The Tsar rode at the head of his guards, accompanied by Gourko. His look was still haughty, and there was in it a strange expression of mingled anxiety and disdain. How would his Capital receive him? This torturing thought filled him with distraction.

As he rode slowly through the crowded streets, it was ominous to notice that there was no clamour of welcome, none of that popular enthusiasm which greets a ruler who comes amongst his people. His city of Moscow gazed upon the Imperial cavalcade in sullen silence, broken only by the low murmuring of subdued voices. The Tsar's brow darkened as he marked this significant fact, and his eye glittered with the fierce fire of royal anger.

"These dogs need whipping to their kennels," he exclaimed to Gourko.

"Pray Heaven the day is near when your Majesty may be able to punish them for their impious disloyalty," replied the minister, whose mind was heavy with foreboding. "Meanwhile, pardon an old servant's license when I earnestly recommend your Majesty to humour these cowards. We must take no wrong step just now. If your Majesty would deign not to notice——"

"There shall be no more submission or pretence," hastily interjected the Tsar. "The Romanoffs are not accustomed to play-act before their subjects. I will be monarch to the end. Our destiny is set by Heaven, and Heaven alone can accomplish it. What news from the north?"

Gourko's voice trembled slightly as he replied:

"St. Petersburg is surrounded, sire. But that alone I would not fear. Danger from without may be met with ease. But——"

"You hesitate! What is it you suspect?"

"This, your majesty. That the city itself may rise. There is disaffection through every rank. Should it have spread to the garrison we must be prepared for bad news indeed."

"And the south?"

"That," replied Gourko, "is for the present not to be counted on. The Nihilists have swarmed over every province, and the Black Sea is no longer in our hands."

"In that case," exclaimed the Tsar, with defiant pride, "we must depend upon ourselves. My forefathers had dangers like these to face, and in the hour of peril proved themselves kings. You will not find me unworthy of them, General. Let us ride on to the Palace. We will prepare a blow that will chill the very heart of rebellion and secure for ever the dominion of my race!"

(To be continued.)

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Puzzled writes to say that he has never yet come across a newspaper labelled "first edition," however early in the day he procures the evening paper. "How is it?"——Because there is no "first"; it begins at the second. This is the result of keen competition between rival publishers. In the same way, many papers advance from the second edition to the fourth.

R. T. B.—It is correct to call or leave cards after a dance to which you have been invited, whether you accepted the invitation or not.

J. T.—About the most rapacious appetite I know of was that possessed by a hog in Scio, Oregon. Its owner often said that it seemed to eat its own bulk of food at each meal. When the hog was killed the other day it was found to possess two perfect stomachs and two complete sets of intestines. No wonder it had such an appetite.

D. S.—In modern history, Leipsic holds the record as the battle in which the greatest number of lives were lost. In that protracted fight, which took place in October, 1813, 80,000 men perished. It was originally stated that in the two great attacks on Plevna, the Russians and their allies lost 46,000 men; but the number is now set down as 30,000.

W. A. H.—Strictly speaking, a creole is one born of European parents in the West Indies, though now the term is frequently used in the Colonies to designate anything West Indian, Negro and English.

C. H. G. writes: "Can you tell me why the figure of a cock is so often to be seen upon the top of a church steeple?"——The cock used to be placed on the top of sacred trees before it was transferred to buildings to disperse, by its gyrations and loud crowing, evil spirits and all the train of approaching calamity.

W.—The air we breathe wants washing occasionally. After a good rainfall the impurities are less in number, and the pleasure with which we take the air into our lungs when we go out after the rain shows that our organism appreciates the result of the washing.

F. N.—In Canton they name streets after the virtues, as we name them after prominent people. In some instances these names do not appear strange to us; Love Street, for instance, does not excite our astonishment. Pure Pearl Street is getting a little beyond us, but Benevolence Street and Unblemished Rectitude Street, especially the latter, go a little too far for our present notions. Perhaps we shall progress after the Tsar's Peace Conference.

Liverpool Juggins.—If a train, moving at the speed of twenty-five miles an hour, were suddenly stopped, the passengers would experience a shock equal to that of falling from a second floor window; at thirty miles an hour, he might as well fall from a height of three flights of stairs: and an express train's sudden stoppage would be like a fall from a fourth storey.

F. D.—The death-plant of Java is thus named on account of the strength of the perfume given off by its flowers. It kills all forms of insect life that come under its influence, and if inhaled for a few minutes by a human being, will overcome and kill him.

H. T.—Although working men are commonly called "Proletarians," strictly speaking, they are nothing of the sort. When King Servius Tullius reorganised the Roman State, he restricted the franchise to men whose property amounted to over £40 of our money and called all who had less, and whose only value to the state consisted in the possibility of becoming fathers to children, a "proletarius" from *proles* a progeny. As the proletarians did not vote, they were not called upon to pay taxes; hence, with this comparison, it is absurd to call "working men" by such a title.

M.—The laws of the United States contain no provision for the notification to the President-Elect that he has been elected. The votes are counted and the result inscribed in the journals of both Houses of Congress, but the successful candidate for the Presidency has to find out the result for himself. There is no trouble about that, of course, but it is strange that there should be such an omission.

R. J. would like to know during what part of the year dogs are most liable to suffer from rabies.——The majority of cases occur in the wettest months. In April, November, and December the recorded cases are double and triple those in June, July and August.

G. G.—Chinese rice paper is made from thin slices of the pith from the cane of a tree about five feet high. A sharp knife pares the pith into cylinders of uniform thickness, which are then unrolled and pressed out into so-called "rice" paper.

B.—The name "blanket" was first given to the fabric of which those comforting articles were made because it was produced by three brothers named Blanket. They were eminent woollen weavers who lived in Bristol in the reign of Edward III.

G. L.—The obituary list of 1893 contained more titles than that of any recent year. Including Baronets, Knights, and Companions (of various orders), it covered 158 titled personages.

Dulwich writes: "A friend of mine insists that the Crystal Palace does not stand in Sydenham. Surely such a statement is ridiculous on the face of it!"——Not at all. The district of Sydenham is entirely in Kent, while the Palace site is in Surrey, near Upper Norwood, the greater part of which is in Lambeth parish.

D. L. P.—The common tortoise sold in the streets for killing black beetles will do nothing of the kind. It exclusively lives on leaves and fruit. Some water tortoises are, however, carnivorous.

Y.—The day set apart for public worship varies with the religion of the worshippers. Christians observe Sunday; with the Greeks it is Monday; the Persians have Tuesday the Assyrians have public worship on Wednesday; the Egyptians on Thursday; the Turks on Friday and the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday.

S.—The wild tribes of the Caucasus teach their children the use of the dagger as soon as the little ones can walk about and hold the weapon. The first task is to stab water without making a splash, not so easy of accomplishment by a child as we might suppose.

F.—One of the largest forests in the world is situated between Ural and the Okhotsk Sea, and may be said to be growing on ice. The authorities had a well dug in that region recently, and it was found that at a depth of 340 feet the ground was still frozen.

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